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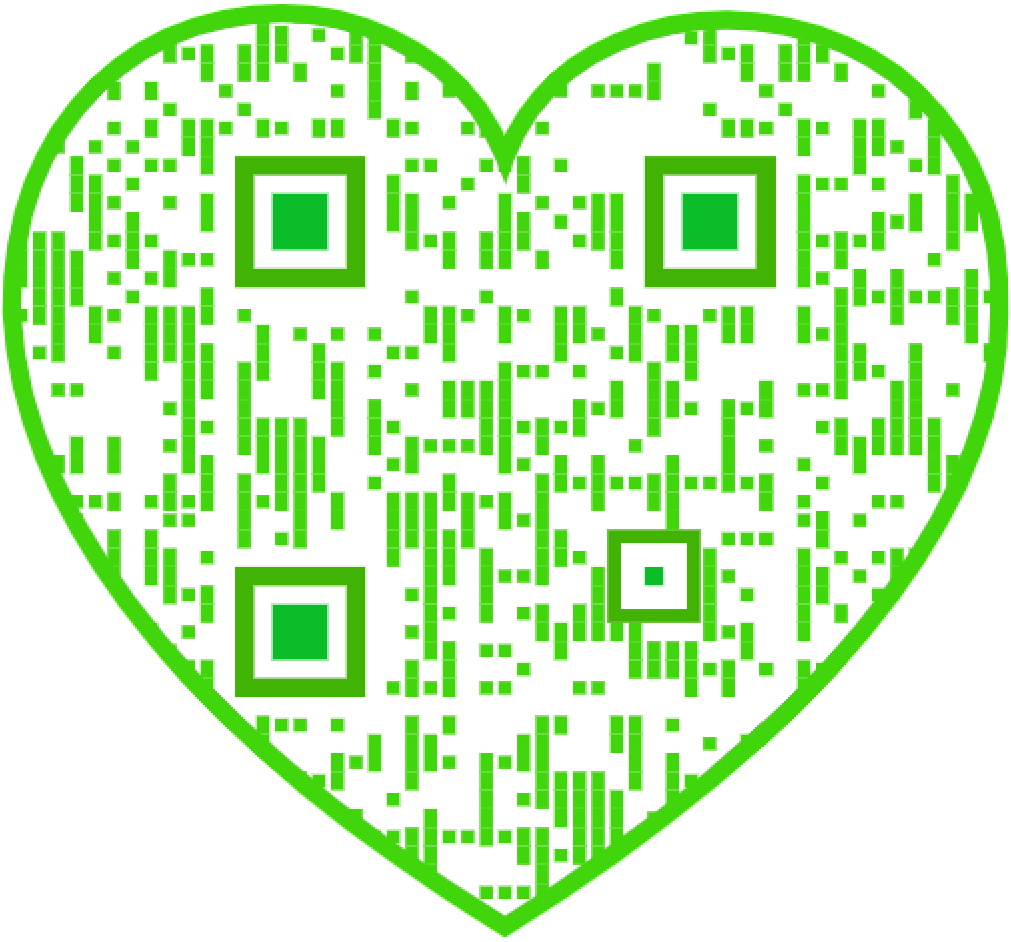

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THIS MONTH

When attending F1 75 Live at London's O2 Arena, it became apparent to me just how significant the LEGO Group's collaboration with Formula 1 is. The occasion celebrated the international tournament's 75th anniversary and it was a big, splashy affair befitting the milestone. Seeing and hearing the enthusiastic audience responding to the teams at the event demonstrated in a visceral way that F1 really is more popular than ever.

Fortunately, we have experts at Blocks magazine and Dave Cartlidge was ready and waiting, like a professional pit stop crew of one, to get the new sets in his hands and put them together. You can get his verdict on the new Speed Champions sets and 10353 Williams Racing FW14B & Nigel Mansell in this month's Reviews section.

If fantasy is more your speed, then you'll be delighted to see the LEGO Group returning to the Shire. More than a decade since Bilbo's house last appeared in the brick, 10354 The Lord of the Rings: The Shire brings back the iconic location. Model Designer Kenyon Brady and Design Manager Ashwin Visser take us into the Middle-earth mindset and explain how they developed the new set.

Once a set is released though, it's up to the builders where they take it. Daniel Konstanki demonstrates just what you can do with an existing model, as he expands the seafood restaurant in 60422 Seaside Harbour and turns it into a fully enclosed and polished building.

There are full instructions for three new mini builds this month – Jango Fett's starship from Star Wars, Thunderfang from NINJAGO and 8964 Titanium Command Rig from modern classic theme Power Miners.

Concepts like Power Miners might never have happened though if Project Genesis had worked out as planned. During a particularly tumultuous time at the LEGO Group, the company thought that the classic brick was outdated and unloved – so decided to come up with an alternative approach and focus on constructible action figures instead. We explore the misguided mission from the early 2000s.

Fortunately, today the brick is celebrated and everyone knows how essential it is. LEGO House is the place in the world where that is most apparent – and I sit down with Master Builder Didac Perez Soriano to get a sense of why. He talks about his experience as a fan, how he came to the iconic location and the amazingly varied projects that he gets to work on.

Leg godt!

Graham

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK
Editor
graham@blocksmag.com

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What we've been building...

Anthony and Graham visited the Toy Project in London to find out how the organisation supports the local community while saving toys from landfill. Naturally the pair were more than happy to roll up their sleeves and get stuck into the various build sessions.

Dave had to build Formula 1 sets at pace to get them over the finish line for this month's mag. Fortunately, he's a huge motorsports fan so it wasn't a chore – you can read his verdict on the sets from page 64.

Once Dave had them built, Phil took the cars into his studio to get some lovely shots of the new sets. For this issue's cover, he had fun getting a dramatic angle of 10353 Williams Racing FW14B & Nigel Mansell from LEGO Icons.

At LEGO Campus, the headquarters building in Billund, Denmark, Daniel discovered a wall of studs and added a message to it with bricks. Hopefully he had enough elements to spell out 'Blocks was here'.

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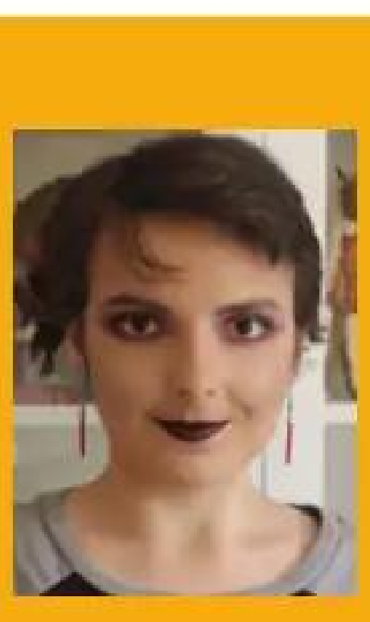
Technology, Saturday morning television and action figures – at the turn of the century, the LEGO Group was ready to leave the brick behind as part of a reimagining that could have changed the company and its products forever.

96 Build and chat with Didac Perez Soriano
It's a pirate's life for talented Master Builder Didac Perez Soriano and Blocks Editor Graham E. Hancock as they sit down in LEGO House to build Captain Redbeard together.

Editor
GRAHAM E. HANCOCK
A LEGO expert who can't remember life without the brick, Graham loves using that knowledge to bring Blocks to readers every single month.



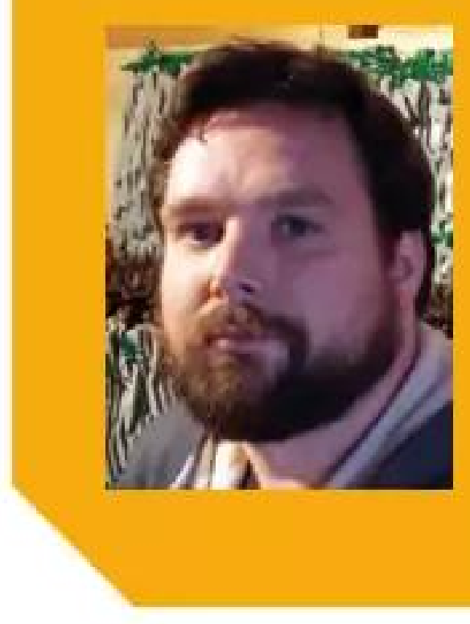
Features Writer
KAT REES-JAUKE
This life-long brick fan is always ready to dig deep into the latest sets to find out how they were conceptualised, designed and developed.

Build Curator
GENEVA DURAND
A 2x2 pillar of the community, Geneva is a respected member of the online creative LEGO scene with an expert eye for the best builds out there.

Build Expert & Historian
DANIEL KONSTANSKI
Both a builder and a collector, Daniel has extensively researched the LEGO Group's history, making him an unrivalled fount of knowledge.

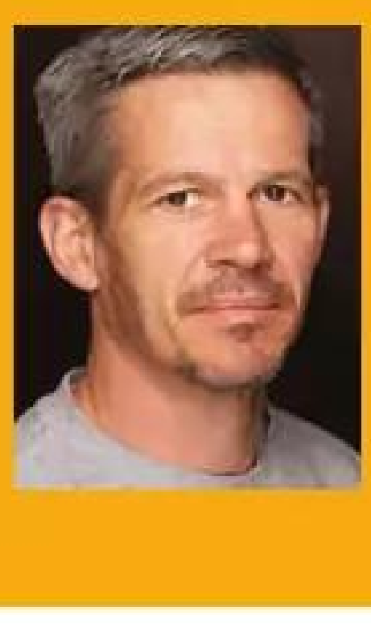
Features Writer
ANTHONY WALKER-COOK
With a passion for fantasy sets but a penchant for any box that features the LEGO logo, Anthony covers every aspect of the brick experience.

News Writer
RYAN EVERLETH
This LEGO aficionado has eclectic tastes, including Star Wars, Ideas and The Lord of the Rings. He always has a take on the latest news.



Build Specialist
SIMON PICKARD
If there's a way to put two bricks together, Simon knows it. He's an experienced builder who is always discovering new techniques.

Reviews Writer
DAVE CARTLIDGE
Whether it's from Marvel Super Heroes, Friends, Technic or any other theme, Dave has the LEGO build know-how to assess the latest sets.



Photographer
PHIL WRIGHTON
Models never look better than when this prize-winning LEGO photographer has worked his magic to produce beautiful Blocks covers.

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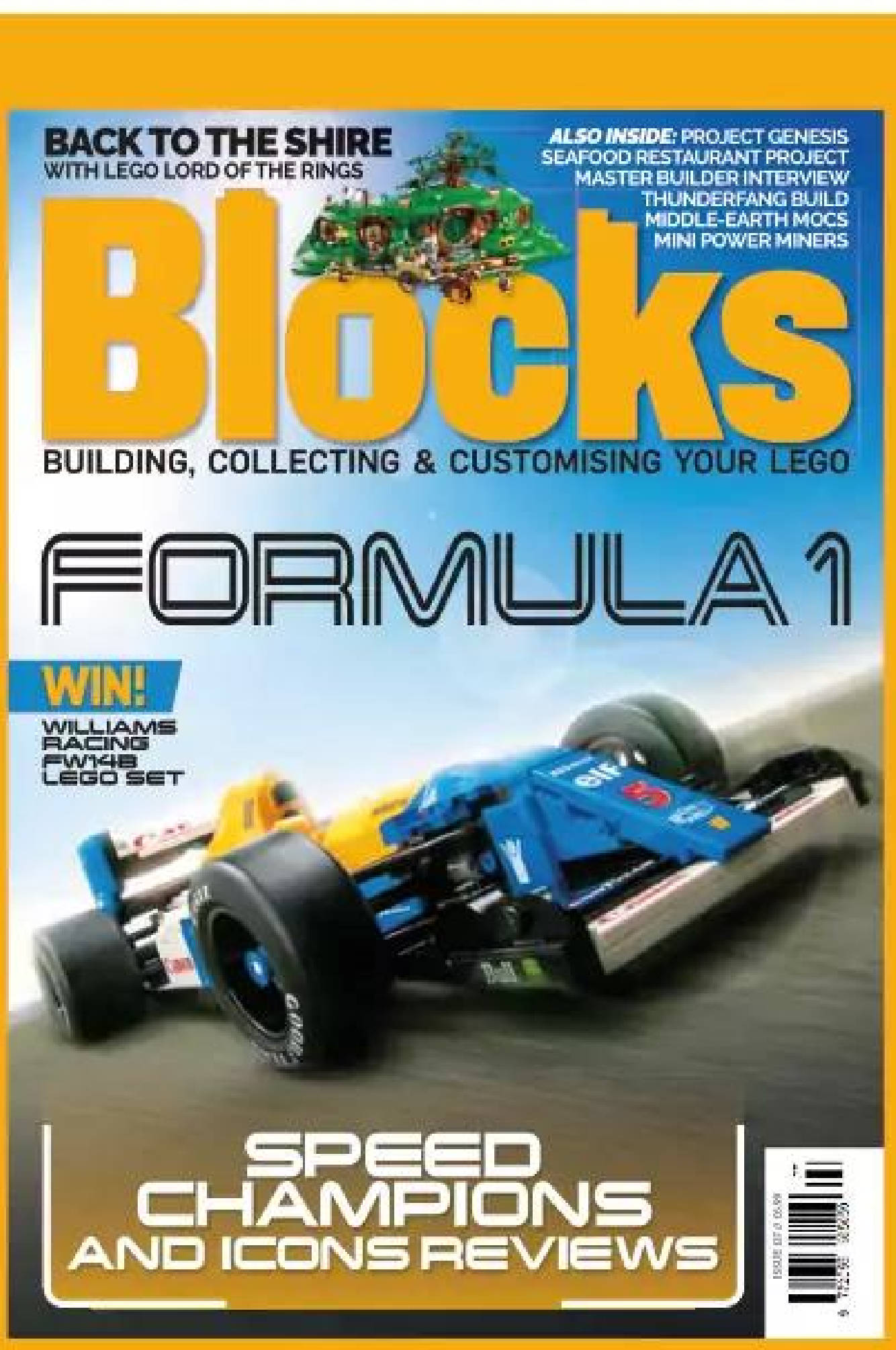

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BUILD AS OLD AS TIME

Beauty and the Beast gets the premium LEGO Disney treatment in a towering new castle set

Another Disney castle has joined the collection, as the LEGO Group continues to explore fan favourite designs from the movies and theme parks in detailed models for the 'mature' fan.

Originally published in 1740, Beauty and the Beast is a French fairytale by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve. It tells the story of a merchant's daughter, quite literally named Beauty, who falls for a man cursed to appear as a beast until he can find love that is more than skin deep.

In the subsequent two and a half centuries, the story was abridged and altered by a handful of authors. Walt Disney intended to adapt the classic fairytale as an animated film during the 1930s and 1950s but ultimately couldn't make the concept work.

In the 1980s, Disney revisited the story. It began as a period drama — notably without any musical numbers — but company executives deemed a traditional musical to be more fitting, so the film was turned over to The Little Mermaid's musical team and found itself a pair of new directors.

The result was a film that dazzled audiences upon its release in 1991. Beauty and the Beast quickly soared to commercial and critical success. Thirty years on, the film is consistently ranked as one of the best Disney animated features, thanks to its magical visuals and heartfelt songs. This iconic, sparkling film has been given the big fancy LEGO treatment in 43263 Beauty and the Beast Castle.

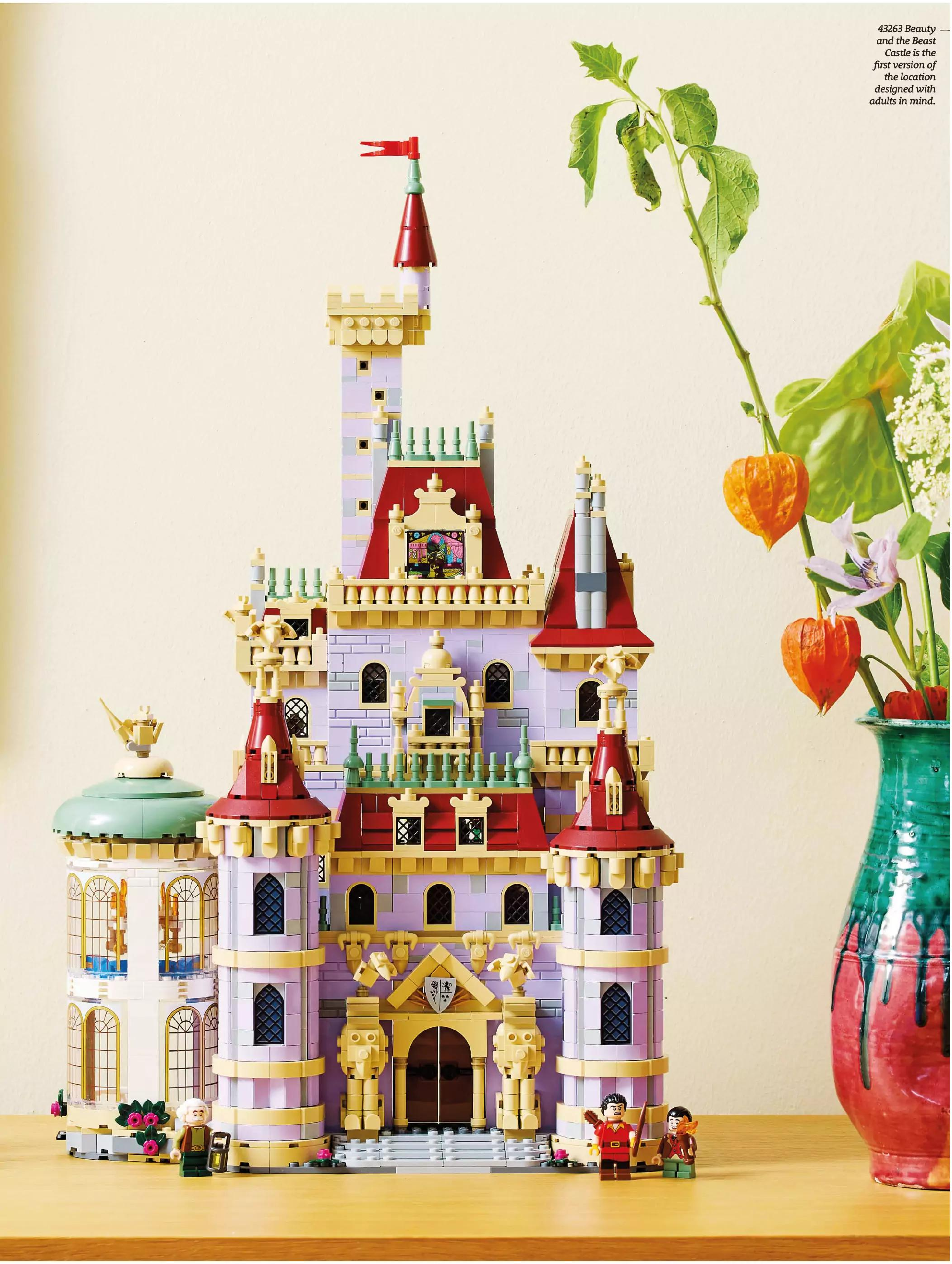
2,916 pieces go into recreating the castle, which measures 53cm (20.5in) tall, 33cm (12.5in) wide and 15cm (6in) deep. Those numbers place it almost 2,000 pieces smaller and 30cm shorter than 43222 Disney Castle, though 43263 does have a slightly more wallet-friendly price than its larger counterpart of £239.99 ($279.99).

The castle uses lavender as its base colour, mixing in a healthy amount of tan for highlights as well as a handful of others scattered about to break up the palette. Rounded pieces and circular building techniques are everywhere on the castle's exterior to capture its many elegant towers. A technique with shades of forced perspective is used, as evidenced by the smaller spire at the top.

Built in the usual dollhouse style, spinning 43263 around will grant access to the four stories' worth of interior details. The ballroom, dining room and tower room are included, all designed to bring the film's most iconic moments to the brick. The ballroom has a spinning floor and enough space to pose Belle and the Beast to recreate the passionate dance they share. And that's not the only spinning feature in the set — the dining room is ready to burst into song with spinning plates and platters.

The figure selection is a mix of five minifigures and five brick-built characters. Some have appeared in minifigure form before, such as Gaston and Belle, while others like Beast make their debut. The brick-built characters include Lumiere and Cogsworth — who are surely excited for the opportunity to host guests in their enchanted LEGO castle.

RYAN EVERLETH



43263 Beauty and the Beast Castle is the first version of the location designed with adults in mind.

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43258 Kakamora Barge
Theme: *Disney*
Pieces: *572*
Price: *£89.99, $99.99, €99.99*

11201 Playground Fun with Bluey and Chloe
Theme: *Bluey*
Pieces: *104*
Price: *£17.99, $19.99, €19.99*

11202 Bluey's Beach & Family Car Trip
Theme: *Bluey*
Pieces: *133*
Price: *£24.99, $29.99, €29.99*

11203 Bluey's Family House
Theme: *Bluey*
Pieces: *382*
Price: *£59.99, $69.99, €69.99*

30687 Bluey Tea Party
Theme: *Bluey*
Pieces: *33*
Price: *£3.49, $3.99, €3.99*

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OUT NOW

10345 Flower Arrangement
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Price: *£94.99, $109.99, €109.99*

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21062 Trevi Fountain
Theme: *Architecture*
Pieces: *1,880*
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21355 The Evolution of STEM
Theme: *Ideas*
Pieces: *879*
Price: *£69.99, $79.99, €79.99*

76968 Tyrannosaurus rex
Theme: *Jurassic World*
Pieces: *3,145*
Price: *£219.99, $249.99, €249.99*

1 **40817 Yellow Travel Suitcase**
Theme: *Classic*
Pieces: *184*
Price: *£12.99, $14.99, €14.99*

40810 LEGOLAND Park Portal
Theme: *LEGOLAND*
Pieces: *323*
Price: *TBC*

2 **71837 NINJAGO City Workshops**
Theme: *NINJAGO*
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Price: *£219.99, $249.99, €249.99*

3

RETIRING SOON

75331 The Razor Crest
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75357 Ghost & Phantom II
Theme: *Star Wars*
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21335 Motorised Lighthouse
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Pieces: *2,065*
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21343 Viking Village
Theme: *Ideas*
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Price: *£124.99, $129.99, €139.99*

75978 Diagon Alley
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Pieces: *5,544*
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4 **76391 Hogwarts Icons**
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10297 Boutique Hotel
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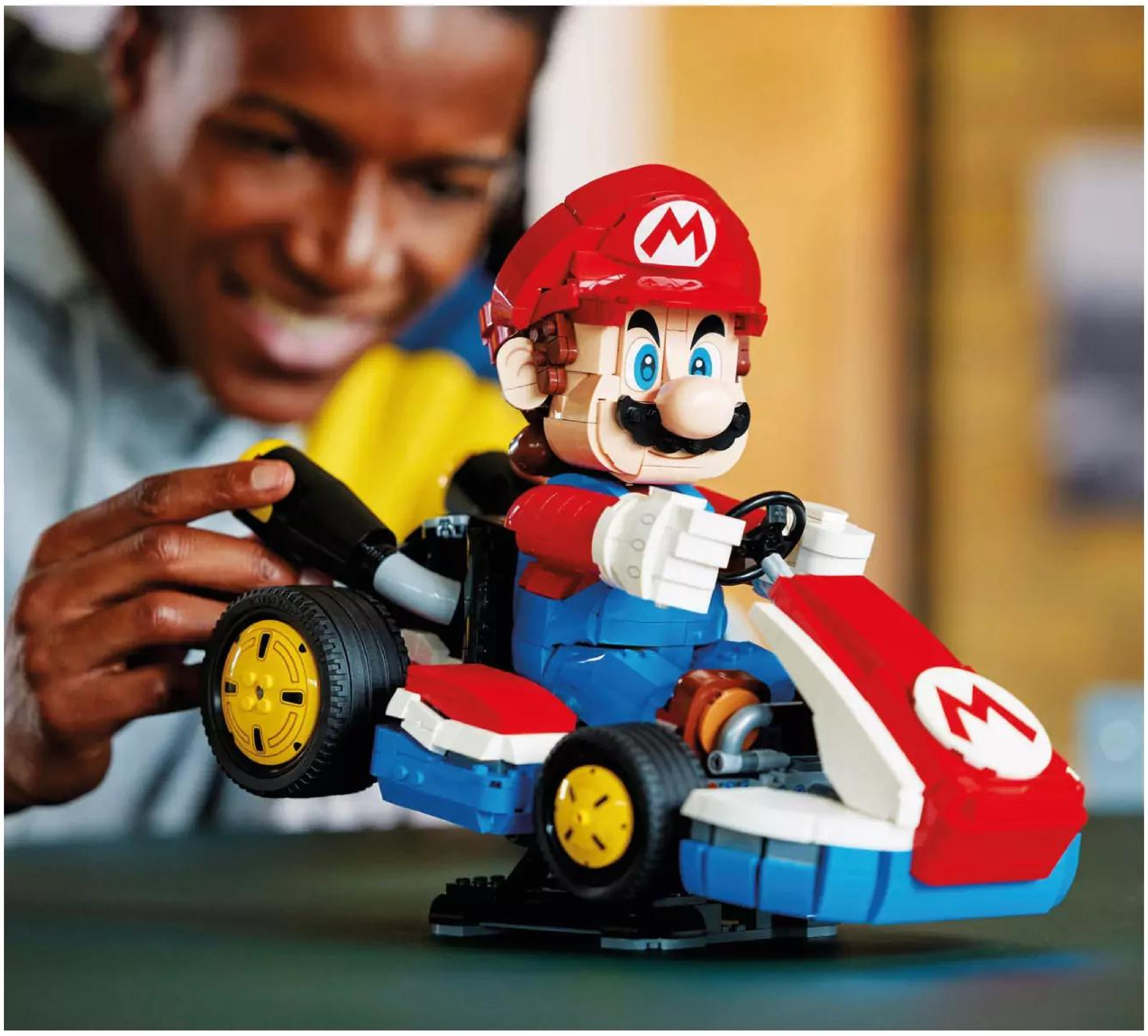
IT'S-A ME, MARIO!

The LEGO Group continues to focus on the classic racer, with Mario's Standard Kart on the way – wahoo!



Mario Kart is still centre stage in 2025's LEGO Super Mario collection. Following the release of playsets in January, the theme's next large-scale adult orientated display model is also based on the popular video game series. 72037 Mario Kart – Mario & Standard Kart is exactly as described, depicting the famous adventurer hitting the track in his trusty custom-branded Kart.

A decent but not obscene 1,972 pieces go into building a full model of Mario and the Standard Kart, along with a small stand that lets the finished build be positioned at an angle, as if racing along one of the games' many wacky tracks. It is comparable in size to 71426 Piranha Plant but significantly smaller than 71411 The Mighty Bowser, two other large LEGO Super Mario character models.

Both Mario and the Standard Kart make liberal use of curved and slope elements in order to capture Mario's organic shape and the sloping details of the Kart. Mario himself is slightly posable, able to raise his arm for his signature celebration when he wins a race or hits an unsuspecting racer with a shell — though no such power-ups or accessories are included in the set.

It's unclear just how much articulation the Mario figure has, mainly when it comes to whether he can stand outside of the Kart or not (more information will come when the set is available for review). The arm suggests that motion was a consideration for the designers, but the precise slopes and other pieces needed to sit Mario properly will likely throw a blue shell into any hopes of displaying Mario independently of his racer.

The Kart can definitely detach from the stand though, adding additional options for display – or taking Mario for a spin around Rainbow Road. Mario would be a lonely racer, as 72037 is built at a much larger scale than other LEGO Mario Kart sets – but you never know, perhaps some of his competitors will be coming down the track in future.

RYAN EVERLETH

Above: *Mario & Standard Kart.*

Far left: *Mario has a bespoke moustache element.*

Left: *The stand allows the kart to be positioned as if in action.*

Anthony's take

"The larger model pays homage to a vital aspect of Mario's history."

In the five years since the introduction of LEGO Super Mario, the theme has covered many key characters, yet its focus on creating an interactive game experience has not necessarily appealed to adult fans, which isn't helped by the theme's relatively high price of entry.

That was the case until 2024, when 71431 Bowser's Muscle Car hinted that something different was coming and the 2025 winter wave launched an entire series of sets based on Mario Kart. Now, the substantial 72037 Mario Kart – Mario & Standard Kart symbolises the theme's changing direction.

This change is just what LEGO Super Mario needed. Other large models have explored Mario's history, like the 2D side-scrolling effect in 71374 Nintendo Entertainment System or the highly effective automaton mechanism behind 71438 Super Mario World: Mario & Yoshi, but it's surprising that many of the theme's larger sets have opted to create anything other than a 3D, brick-built Mario.

Although Mario made his first game appearance in 1985, it's arguable that his fortune has been made through his appearances both in his own standalone games (like Super Mario 64, Super Mario Bros and Super Mario Odyssey) and in ensemble titles, many of which have focused on sports.

72037 celebrates both Mario and his continuing success across a variety of video game styles. Mario Kart is an apt choice as it's strongly aligned with the LEGO ethos of co-operative play – I have many strong memories of playing race after race on Mario Kart for the Nintendo DS during the school bus ride home. It was a simpler time.

It's a shame that it appears Mario cannot be removed from the kart, but it probably hides a few sins – I'm not convinced Mario's overalls could be pulled off in a standing position without giving him an unsightly split between his stomach and legs.

No matter how you feel about the kart's inclusion, you can see that the character's entire face looks brilliant. Thanks to the kart, he's not just awkwardly standing, but instead is the focal point of a larger model that pays homage to a vital aspect of his history within video games.

Hopefully this new direction will herald more adult interest in the theme. Come to think of it, Mario's catchphrase "Let's-a-go" sounds eerily close to "Leg godt" – no wonder Mario and LEGO bricks go so well together.

Brick CENTRAL

Get involved

BrickCentral is an online community of photographers who take creative photos of LEGO models and minifigures. We've always got some fun activities for LEGO fans to do like photography themes, contests, tips and community projects. Our Discord, Instagram and Tumblr communities are home to thousands of members from around the world who want to share and discover LEGO photography.

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Discord: *discord.gg/HwkZFH5*

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MEET.... LUKR – LEGO UK Railway

Richard Carter introduces a group of LEGO train enthusiasts who share their passion through impressive layouts

Find out more

Location: *UK*
Website: *lukrailway.co.uk*
Instagram: *@lnurailway / @lsurailway*
Facebook: *lukrailway*

LEGO UK Railway (LUKR) was formed in August 2017 by a small group of friends who had met at LEGO shows in the north of England and were all interested in LEGO trains somehow – building locomotives and rolling stock or railway scenery. We are actually two clubs in one, with LEGO Northern UK Railway (LNUR) coming first, and LEGO Southern UK Railway added as we accumulated members in the south of England, but we share our resources and come together at shows.

Today, we have more than 60 members spread across the UK from Glasgow to Exeter, plus a handful of international members in the Netherlands, Australia and the USA who build British prototypes.

One of our most popular club activities is the annual member wagons. We host a competition each year for members to submit their LEGO wagon designs and the winning design is made available with instructions, a parts list and custom printed tiles. This results in many wagons being created for use at events, allowing us to run prototypically long trains. They're really fun to build and look great at shows!

Club members largely meet at LEGO and model railway shows throughout the UK. We have our annual member weekend each August, which provides a space for club members to set our layouts up, run trains, test ideas and chat – it's like an exhibition without the public.

We also host a range of challenges at member weekends – some sensible, some silly – with brick-built trophies for the winners. These have included everything from fastest locomotive to jousting with trains, train golf, relay races, and members' favourite models for locomotives, wagons and scenery.

The LUG builds collaborative layouts with trains running all the way around.

SEVERN VALLEY AND SPA VALLEY EVENTS

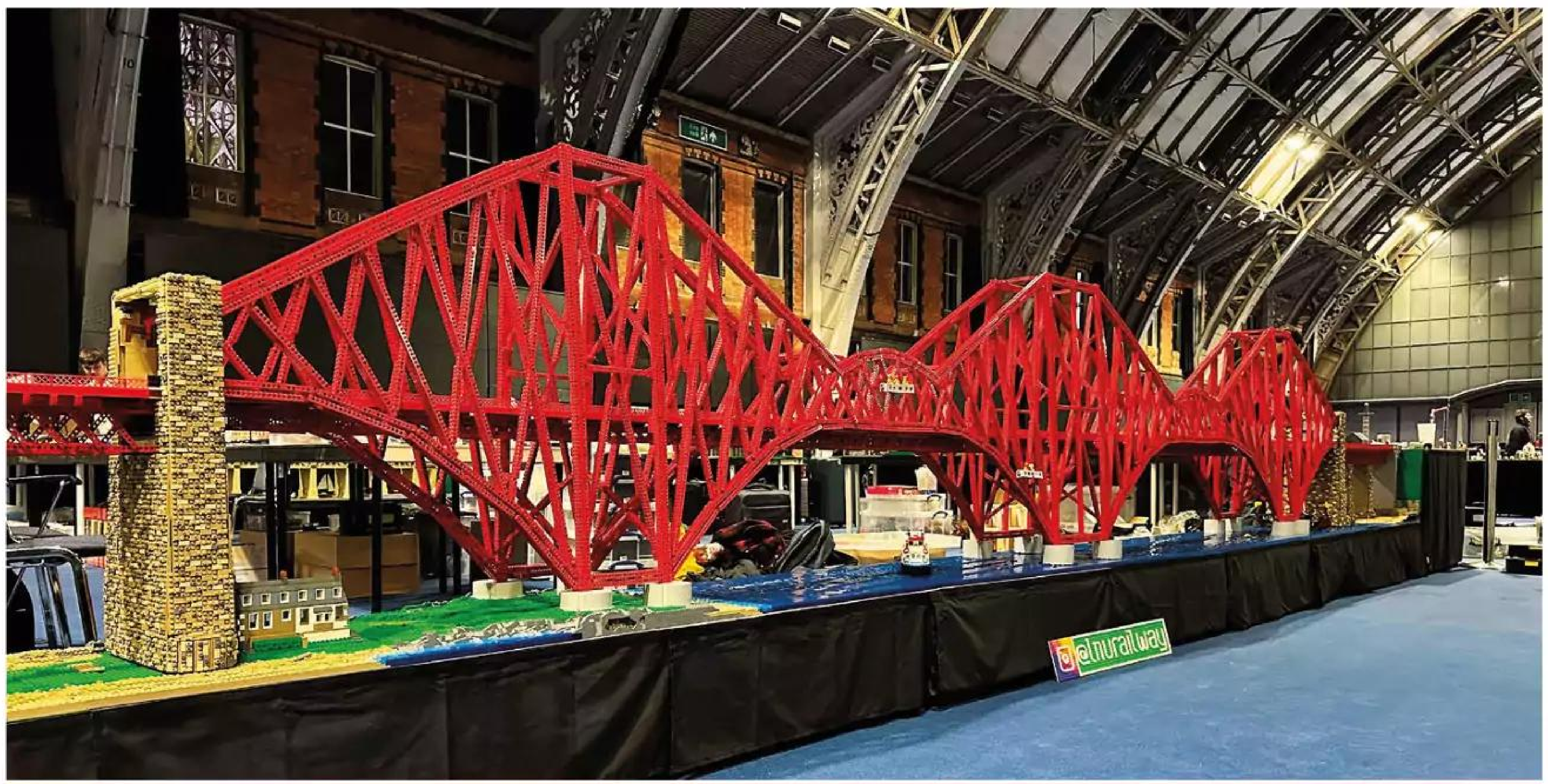
Historically, the club hasn't organised our own shows – we've attended events organised by other LEGO User Groups. That changed last year though.

In 2024 we organised our first club events at Severn Valley Railway in the West Midlands and Spa Valley Railway in Kent. These shows were a lot of fun for us as train fans – who wouldn't want to display LEGO trains at a real heritage railway? – and were well received by the public, so will be back again in 2025. We are also hosting an event the Watercress Railway in September 2025, so we must have a real love of heritage railways.

Above: *Northern club members built an eight metre long model of the Forth Bridge built from 100,000 LEGO bricks.*

Far left: *Multiple trains can run around the tracks.*

Left: *Some members build scenery for the trains to travel through.*



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Events Calendar

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Darlington Brick Show (UK)
When: *July 12 – 13*
Where: *Dolphin Centre, Darlington*
What's On: *A new show organised by local Brick Alley LUG members to celebrate their club's 10th anniversary.*
Visit: *brickalleylug.co.uk/events/darlington-brick-show*

Brick Féile (Ireland)
When: *July 19 – 20*
Where: *CityNorth Hotel & Conference Centre, Gormanston, Dublin*
What's On: *LEGO models from builders across Ireland, the UK and further afield, plus play pits and trade stands.*
Visit: *brickféile.ie*

Severn Valley Brick Weekend (UK)
When: *August 2 – 3*
Where: *Highley Engine House, Bridgnorth*
What's On: *This fan-organised event features LEGO model displays with a focus on trains, interactive exhibits and trade stalls. It takes place at the Highley Engine Shed on the Severn Valley Railway heritage line.*
Visit: *lukrailway.co.uk/severn-valley-brick-weekend*

STEAM – Great Western Brick Show (UK)
When: *October 11 – 12*
Where: *STEAM - Museum of the Great Western Railway, Swindon*
What's On: *LEGO model displays, activities and trade stalls set against the backdrop of a train museum.*
Visit: *greatwesternbrickshow.com*

Shildon Brick Show (UK)
When: *November 1 – 2*
Where: *Locomotion Museum, County Durham*
What's on: *LEGO model displays, activities and marketplace.*
Visit: *brickalleylug.co.uk/events*

Build: *Northern Club Layout*
Builders: *LNUR*
Instagram: *@lnurailway*

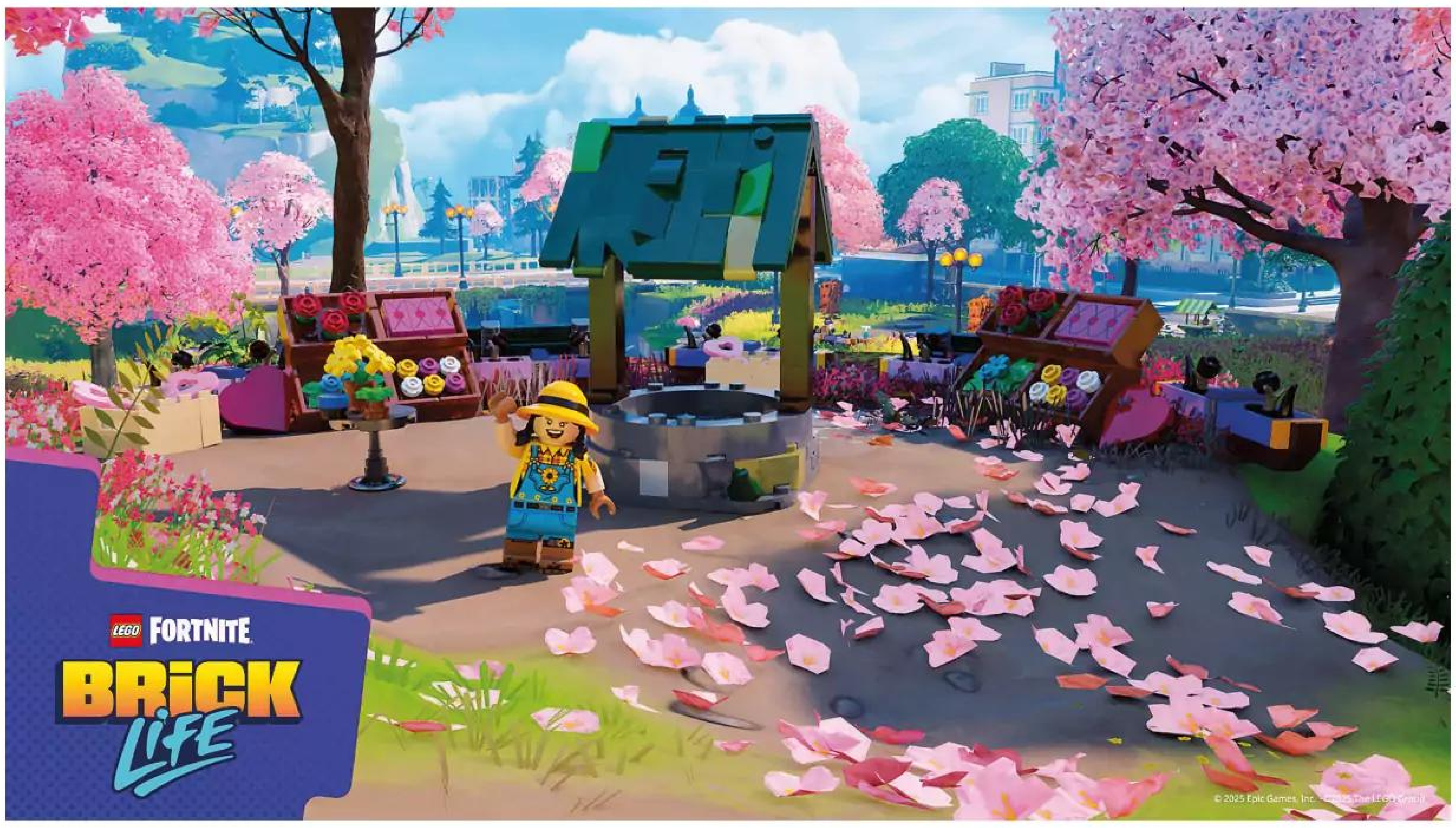
Build: *22t Iron Ore Hopper Wagon*
Builder: *Andrew Harvey*

Build: *Southern Club Layout*
Builders: *LSUR*
Instagram: *@lsurailway*

Gaming Download

GET GREEN FINGERS IN THE GARDEN

Minifigures can now take on an active role cultivating the plants in Brick Life



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LEGO Fortnite: Brick Life is all about living your best life as a minifigure in the sprawling urban metropolis of Brick Bay. It's a place where anyone can be anybody, whether that's a professional prankster or an office worker at the bank. There are a whole range of potential jobs to earn in-game currency and a new one has just been added in the v.34.00 update – City Gardener.

Brick Bay takes green living seriously and there are a selection of parks, woodlands and beaches interspersed between the skyscrapers. They're the perfect places for picnics or sunbathing. Yet who is keeping these places free from litter? Who is pruning the bushes? Well, that's now up to green-fingered players. After meeting Sunflower at her Gardening Stand (which is close to The Trot Lot) in the south parkland, she'll offer you the job of City Gardener.

Previous professions have felt rather point-and-click in Brick Life, but this latest addition is far more rewarding. After accepting the role, your job is to go around the city pulling up troublesome weeds, trimming trees and replanting flowers to add a splash of colour. And unlike the other 9 to 5 jobs that require fetch quests or sitting at a desk, being a City Gardener is a 24/7 experience that you can even do if you're a night owl.

With the park blending into the suburbs where players can choose a lot for their homes, becoming a City Gardener allows for greater customisation of the gardens surrounding your house. Need to change the colour of the flowers to reflect the seasons or to match your decor? Just plant some new ones and pick from the range of colours available.

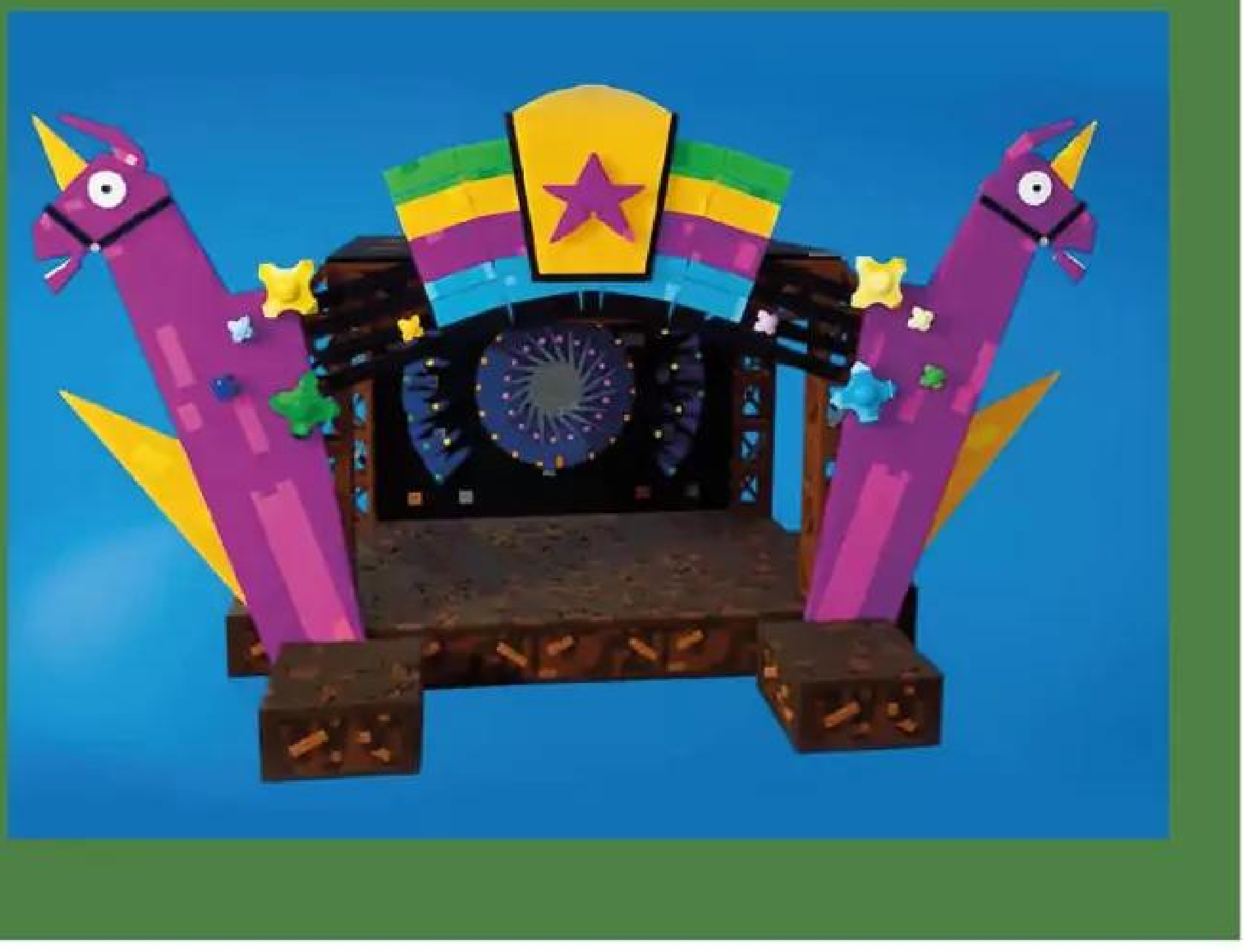
Alongside these new tasks there are also some changes to the natural environment, including an adjustment to the lighting to better reflect dusk and dawn with the in-game time. Rain is being added to the weather cycles, so minifigures will now need umbrellas to avoid getting soaked. And characters can now get muddy from either the rain or gardening, so make sure to wash up before grabbing a snack at Durr Burger.

City Gardener is the latest addition to LEGO Fortnite Brick Life and its daily activities, available to play now with the Fortnite v34.00 update.

KAT REES-JAUKE

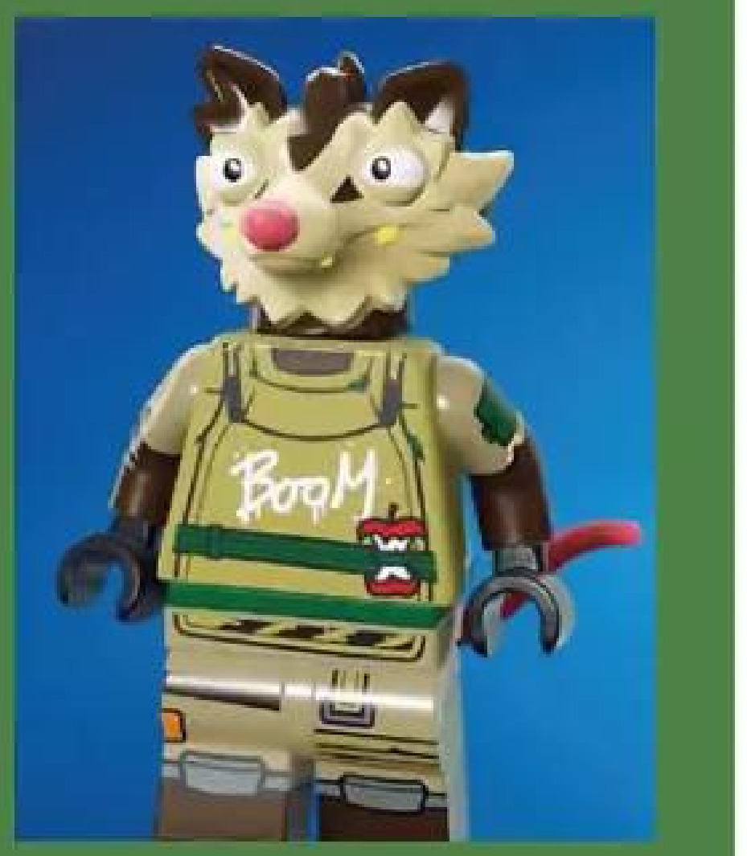
Main Stage

With a multitude of dancing and singing emotes available for LEGO Fortnite Odyssey characters, building a stage is a great way to show off their skills. While the stage itself may seem a little haphazard, with its stacked crates and dubiously nailed planks, the decorations more than make up for it. Framed by the iconic llamas in bright magenta, there are a multitude of sparkling star decals and fireworks. Additionally the back of the stage has a set piece that mimics flashing strobe lights in a striking spiral pattern. It's a great build for parties or co-op raves!



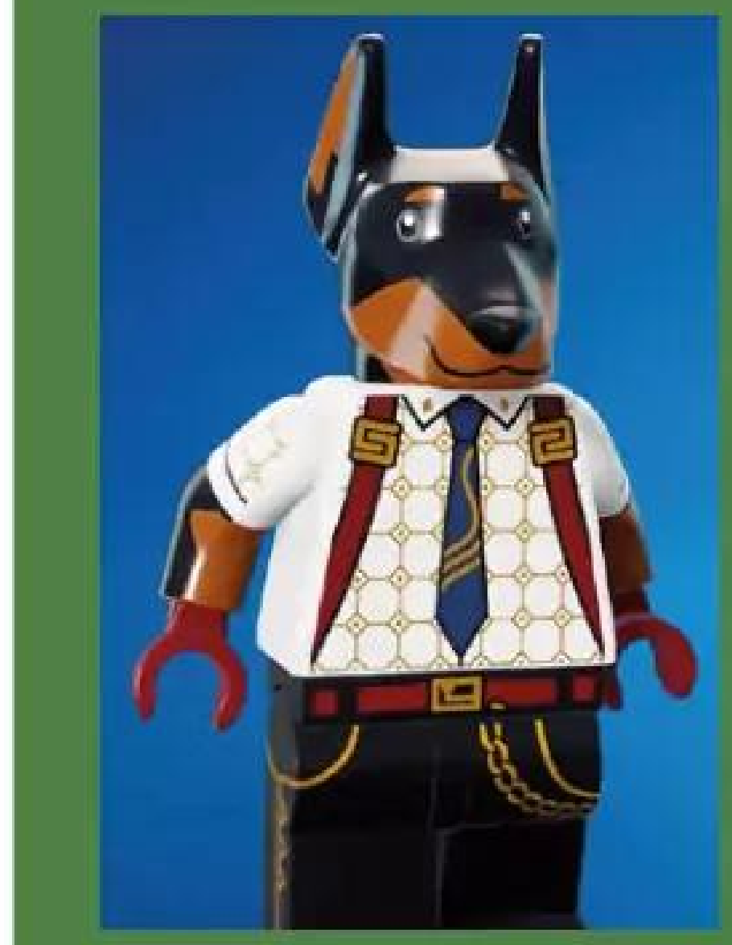
New Fortnite characters

Skillet



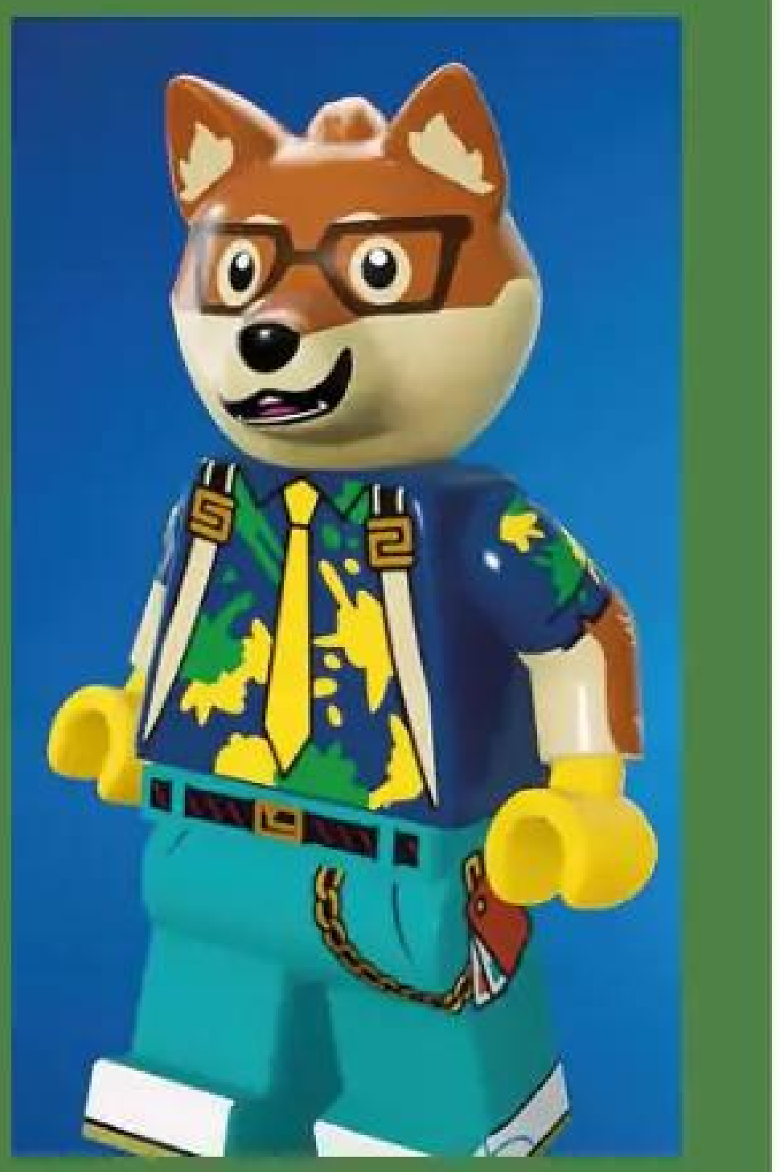
Fortnite has plenty of wacky characters to choose from and Skillet is one of them. If you like Duke Weaseton from Zootopia then Skillet has the same vibes. He's suitably sketchy looking in a ripped t-shirt, cargo pants with plenty of pockets and an apple core for reasons unknown.

Duke



With a studded shirt collar and burgundy slacks, Duke has a debonair elegance that matches his Doberman physique. His gold patterned shirt and striped pants only add to his style. This is a wonderfully elegant canine character that is a perfect outfit for fans of the breed.

Alphonse



Clearly inspired by the famous Japanese dog breed, the Shiba Inu, this character is all about creativity. He's splattered head to tail in paint, with a collection of swatch colours on his belt for easy reference, and yellow gloves to help keep the paint off his paws.

Fortnite phraseology

JOURNAL

A recent addition to the LEGO Fortnite Odyssey interface is the Journal. Do you feel overhelmed by quests? Has it been a while since you last played and you can't remember what you were doing? That's where the Journal is invaluable. It acts as an in-game record of player progress, tracking Village Levels and NPC quests.

You can also pin goals from the Journal to track on the main screen, so you don't need to continuously refer to it in order to keep track of what you are collecting or where you need to go next.

What's new at bricklink

What is BDP?

BrickLink Designer Program is a way for fans to turn their builds into official LEGO sets. Each year, 15 fan-designed models will be available to pre-order as part of a very limited production run. Sets are limited to 30,000 copies per design.

PRE-ORDERS OPENING SOON FOR BDP SERIES 5

New BrickLink Designer Program sets will be available to pre-order in June, including models inspired by pirates, vampires and even a mushroom town

Another eclectic selection of BrickLink Designer Program sets will soon be available to pre-order from the BrickLink website in what may be the most varied range of options to date. There's truly something for everyone, whether it's cosy fantasy or vintage machinery.

There is another classic Pirates inspired model, The Thieves of Tortuga, which uses 3,398 pieces to recreate a sprawling stronghold based upon Fort de Rocher – the infamous pirate's resting spot during the 17th century. It captures the busy dynamics of a port as pirates patrol the shore while a band cheerfully plays outside the tavern.

For fans wanting more fantastical storytelling, Adventures in Transylvania is basically Dracula's dream home. Gothic architecture seamlessly combines with an autumnal landscape that's echoed in the dark red masonry of the castle. "What began as an innocuous venture into the picturesque hills soon twisted into a tale of dread," explained the builder known as SleeplessNight. "The castle, far from deserted, was devoid of any living soul, yet it teemed with an unsettling presence that defied the bounds of mortal existence." As a figure watches over them from the tallest tower, all of the characters in the set look suitably scared.

However, Jonas Kramm is providing the other end of the fantasy spectrum if you're not quite ready for Halloween in summer. Continuing his cosy story that began with 910037 Mushroom House, the Mushroom Village explores this magical world even further. "The Tiny World of Wonders plays with scale, so a ladybug becomes a mount and large droplets of morning dew can be found on the leaves," the talented creative said. "Minifigures are included to show the inhabitants of the Mushroom Village, such as the wizard, an elf with a backpack and a garden gnome."

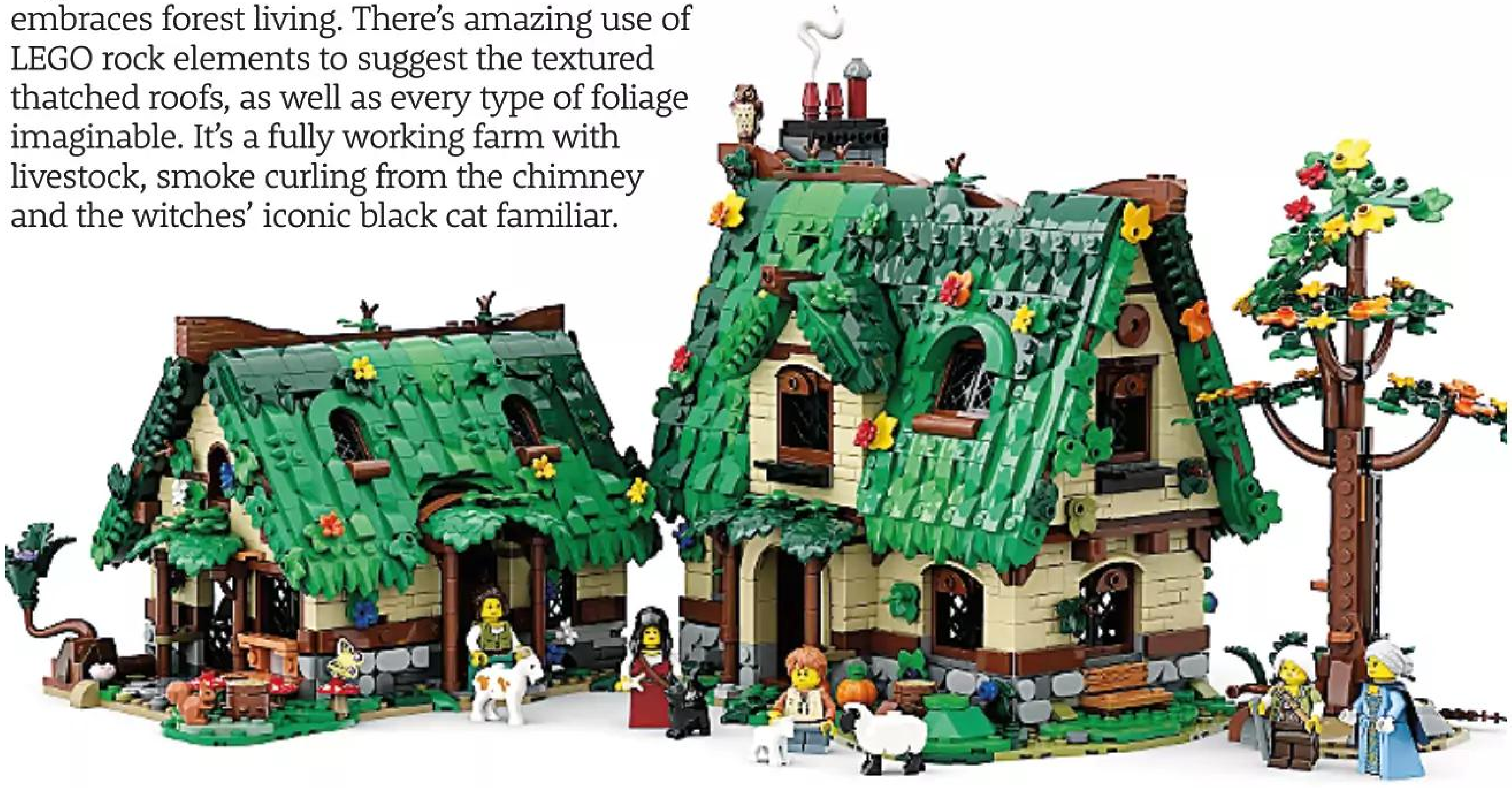
By contrast, the final two models are grounded in reality. The Antique Shop uses its 1,912 pieces to craft a picturesque home brimming with trinkets and oddities that are fully reachable for play via a removable roof and modular second floor.

The fifth set in Series 4 is Popcorn Wagon, which conjures up the scents of an amusement park. The aim of the project was to design a smaller model to fit a variety of setups including parks, city squares and beaches. Going by the handle Mictur, the builder behind it hopes that fellow fans will enjoy incorporating it into a variety of different displays. "A bit of rework and it can also turn into a great Winter Village addition," they said. All five BrickLink Designer Program Series 5 sets will be available to preorder on June 10, 2025.

KAT REES-JAUKE

Build Spotlight

Castor_troy's verdant build is a celebration of green as a coven of friendly witches embraces forest living. There's amazing use of LEGO rock elements to suggest the textured thatched roofs, as well as every type of foliage imaginable. It's a fully working farm with livestock, smoke curling from the chimney and the witches' iconic black cat familiar.



Important dates

June 10, 2025
Series 5 sets open for pre-order

July 2025
Series 4 sets start shipping

October 2025
Series 5 sets start shipping

October 6, 2025
Series 6 sets open for pre-order

February 2026
Series 7 open for pre-order

July 2026
Series 7 sets start shipping

Screen Time

BRAD PITT'S WINNING FORMULA

F1 is promising to convey the visceral thrills of the circuit more authentically than any movie has before

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF TOP GUN: MAVERICK
BRAD PITT
ONLY IN THEATERS
JUNE 27
FILMED FOR IMAX

It can't have escaped your attention that the LEGO Group has partnered with Formula 1 this year, as drivers and teams compete for the titles of World Drivers' Champion and World Constructors' Champion for the 76th time.

There is not just a whole host of LEGO sets to buy though, there's also a movie arriving in cinemas this June. In F1, Brad Pitt stars as Sonny Hayes, a Formula 1 driver who was forced to retire in the 1990s after a crash on the course. Since then, Sonny has been racing in less prestigious tournaments.

In true cinema tradition, Javier Bardem's character persuades the former F1 driver to come out of retirement and mentor Joshua 'Noah' Pearce, played by Damson Idris, for the Apex Grand Prix team.

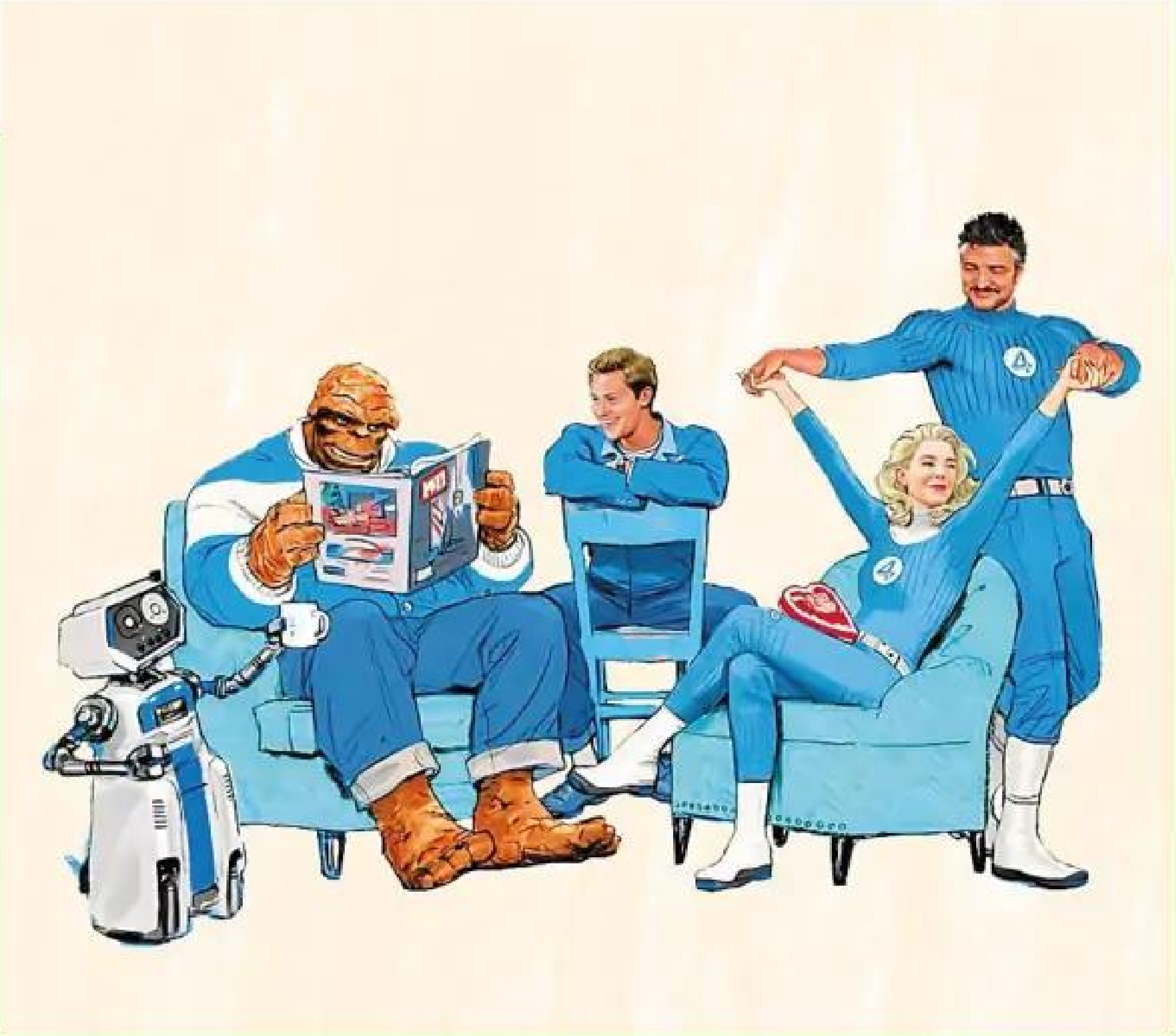
As an official movie licensed by Formula 1, director Joseph Kosinski had unprecedented access to the tracks and the races, allowing him to get very special footage. "We're shooting at the actual Grands Prix, there are certain aspects of this film where we're working in very, very tight windows, shooting on the track, between practice and qualifying sessions, in front of hundreds of thousands of people," he told Deadline.

The expertise of Mercedes will also ensure that the film captures the high-octane nature of top tier motorsports. "We worked closely with Mercedes and their design team and aerodynamicists to develop a custom body that resembles the latest generation Formula 1 car.

"They're built specifically for this movie. They also have 15 camera mounts built into them, including the recorders and the batteries and the transmitters. They're made for shooting movies, but they are fundamentally race cars."

F1 is produced by Apple Original Films and will be distributed in cinemas by Warner Bros.

FANTASTIC AGAIN



When the entertainment giant acquired Fox, Disney gained the rights to release Fantastic Four movies as part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Set on a 1960s-inspired retro-futuristic Earth, the Fantastic Four will go up against Galactus this summer.

Pedro Pascal, Vanessa Kirby, Joseph Quinn and Ebon Moss-Bachrach will portray the team while Ralph Ineson brings the villainy as Galactus. Casting the characters proved challenging, as names such as Adam Driver and Jake Gyllenhaal proved too expensive for Marvel Studios.

"The comic was created in the early 1960s, really at the same time that the space race was starting, so it is infused with that idea of looking to the stars and dreaming of a future where we would be space travellers," said director Matt Shakman. "I really wanted to take all of that great stuff from Apollo 11 and just imagine that instead of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, it was the Storms and Ben Grimm and Reed Richards heading off into space."

One we want...

Where's Andor? With the espionage-infused Star Wars series back on Disney+, fans really deserve some LEGO sets. It's perhaps not the most family friendly iteration of the saga, but a diorama set of Luthen Rael's antique shop could be fun.

Upcoming movies

JURASSIC WORLD REBIRTH
RELEASE DATE: *July 2*
WRITTEN BY: *David Koepp*
DIRECTED BY: *Gareth Edwards*
CAST: *Scarlett Johansson, Mahershala Ali, Jonathan Bailey, Rupert Friend*

SUPERMAN
RELEASE DATE: *July 11*
WRITTEN BY: *James Gunn*
DIRECTED BY: *James Gunn*
CAST: *David Corenswet, Rachel Brosnahan, Isabela Merced, Edi Gathegi, Nathan Fillion*

THE FANTASTIC FOUR: FIRST STEPS
RELEASE DATE: *July 25*
WRITTEN BY: *Jeff Kaplan, Ian Springer, Josh Friedman, Eric Pearson, Peter Cameron*
DIRECTED BY: *Matt Shakman*
CAST: *Pedro Pascal, Vanessa Kirby, Joseph Quinn, Ebon Moss-Bachrach*

Upcoming series

IRONHEART
WHERE TO WATCH: *Disney+*
PREMIERE DATE: *June 24*
EPISODES: *6*
SHOWRUNNER: *Chinaka Hodge*
CAST: *Dominique Thorne, Anthony Ramos, Lyric Ross, Alden Ehrenreich*

PEACEMAKER SEASON 2
WHERE TO WATCH: ***Max***
PREMIERE DATE: *August*
EPISODES: *8*
SHOWRUNNER: *James Gunn*
CAST: *John Cena, Danielle Brooks, Freddie Stroma, Jennifer Holland*

LEGO Masters-piece

In the LEGO Masters Australia Season 4 final, Joss and Henry built the truly epic Kaiju Monster vs Mecha Crab scene. They spent 28 hours perfecting the enormous monster and mega mech, which led to them winning the season.

The Brick Debate

Is the LEGO Group releasing sets releases too frequently?

Kat says…

"I prefer the more simplified releases of January and June."

It seems I can't walk into a shop without being hit by a barrage of new LEGO sets, no matter the time of year. I exaggerate slightly, but there are new sets coming out every month, far beyond the old way of just launching a big batch of sets in January and June. Those two months still hold the biggest launches in terms of quantity, but they've lost a lot of their gusto recently as sets trickle out throughout the year.

Regular readers might be growing tired of me always using niche Star Wars examples for everything, but the long-running theme once again presents a helpful illustration. LEGO Star Wars used to be one of the strictest followers of the January/June formula, but has taken to much more staggered releases over the past few years. The most baffling of which is its new habit of having a spring wave, which this year consisted of just one set — 75429 AT-AT Driver Helmet. To that, I simply ask, why? Why not release it in January with the main wave or in May with the May the Fourth sets?

In the grand scheme of things, it's not a huge deal, since LEGO sets are on shelves for about two years anyway, but it only serves to complicate releases. Fans can no longer mark January 1 and June 1 on their calendar and call it a day. Now they have to contend with seemingly random releases every month. And the releases are not always on the first day, either — 43263 Beauty and the Beast Castle launched on April 4 and 21356 River Steamboat set sail on April 10. It all seems unnecessarily convoluted.

I suppose more sporadic releases keep the brand relevant and fresh, creating consistent headlines and getting people into shops more frequently. There's also some benefit to staggered releases when it comes to gift with purchases, as well. It'd be a little ridiculous to expect fans to afford multiple giant sets on a single day just to get all of the associated rewards. In that instance, I can see the appeal of more spread out release seasons.

But coming from a general fan perspective, I can't help but prefer the more simplified releases of January and June, or at the very least, the first of the month. It just keeps things simple and easy to follow, especially for more casual fans who aren't religiously checking up on the latest rumours and release news.

KAT-REES JAUKE

Ryan says…

"There is a lot on the market, LEGO sets don't launch too frequently."

LEGO set releases used to be almost celebratory affairs two to three times a year, yet now products launch at least every month. Different sets are flooding the market as there are new licenses, anniversaries and tie-ins for upcoming cinema releases. And those are just the regular waves of LEGO sets without considering the massive Icons and Ideas models. There is a lot on the market, but I don't believe that LEGO sets are launching too frequently.

Most monthly releases are for completely different themes. It's not like there are launches for Friends or City every month. They come in waves at the start of the year and early summer. Most of the monthly releases are awarded to the LEGO Group's ever expanding repertoire of licensed sets, so are often influenced by cinema scheduling. There will be a Wicked launch one month and a Jurassic World launch another month. Different licenses appeal to different fans, so it's much easier to keep up with these launches if you're only interested in certain fictional universes.

Some themes like Harry Potter only have two main launches within a year, which certainly gives fans enough time to choose which sets they want to collect. While these themes also have adult models released each year, such massive sets don't appeal to every collector. The last LEGO Star Wars Ultimate Collector Series (UCS) set I acquired was 75367 Venator-Class Republic Attack Cruiser. That was two years ago and I've ignored all of the subsequent UCS launches.

The LEGO Group produces a wide variety of sets to appeal to a broad and growing range of fans, so it should be easy to ignore certain boxes. Not every LEGO set or theme is for every fan. It's the variety that encourages more people to discover the brick, which naturally means that product launches are frequent. All of the sets need to get onto shelves and into warehouses.

It also gives the sets time to shine at launch. If it was back in the day when there were only two launch windows, then it would be extremely overwhelming, both physically and financially. This isn't as much of an issue though because the monthly launches are smaller. It allows marketing hype to build up around the new sets for that month and for the right fans to discover amazing new LEGO sets.

RYAN EVERLETH

Q&A

Chorley Bricks

Gary Foxcroft had LEGO sets sitting around not being built – so he started a business to allow other fans to rent them

When you buy a LEGO set, you have the joy of building it, then the fun of displaying it and perhaps the task of storing it. Once you start buying many, many LEGO sets though, displaying and storing become challenges that needs to be overcome. Gary Foxcroft is offering builders the opportunity to rent a set and build it, without having to then deal with storing it. Through his company Chorley Bricks, he is renting out sets.

Blocks: How did the business begin? Where did you get the idea of renting out LEGO sets?

Gary: I was aware of investing in LEGO sets from a book – The Ultimate Guide to Collectible LEGO Sets; Identification and Price Guide, so I bought £1,000 of sets and forget about them. When the pandemic hit in 2020, I thought I might be furloughed and decided to build Ghostbusters 75827 Firehouse Headquarters. I had bought it at a discount, then sold it at a higher value for good profit and started buying job lots and flipping sets. I just kept flipping and was making a good profit.

I kept buying good job lots and collections, but sets don't go up in value until they are retired – I had used sets just waiting to be sold. I asked myself if someone would just love to build this set and maybe pay me a rental fee. The rental part of Chorley Bricks was born in 2021. At that time it was local collection only with a deposit.

In 2023 I saw a social media post for a Lend-A-Brick in Belgium, offering LEGO sets for rent across mainland Europe, shipped in sturdy plastic boxes. I copied what he was doing using an online rental portal – in June 2023, nationwide LEGO rentals became possible.

We dropped asking for deposits and that streamlined the business. Since December 2024 our bookings per month went from between 62 and 72 to 84 in February 2025. Before December we were in the mid-30s in a good month.

How do customers choose the sets they want to rent? How long do they get them for?

People can go to the rental portal via our website, choose from more than 100 sets and select their preferred duration – between two and five weeks. They select the day they want the rental to start and either the collection time or delivery. The system gives me time to prep the set and for it to be returned before someone else can rent it. Now the sets are always in use and it's a fluid process.

The advantage is clear for those who are not collectors but appreciate a large and challenging build without the price tag. Paying £35 for a three week rental – if collected – for 10294 Titanic is much better than £589.99 to buy it. That's it, no hidden fees. At the end, the set has to be returned back into the numbered bags as received, the renter just needs to follow the instructions backwards.

What have been the best things about running your own brick business?

Since January 1, what started as a side hustle has been my full-time passion – but the marketing, the social media posts, the shipping, the returns, the replacing parts didn't fill my day, so we ran our inaugural Chorley Community Group event on March 11. We have also visited a care home to offer the residents a different kind of activity, free of charge to them.

Gary Foxcroft (left) arranged a Chorley Community Group event to bring people together over a spot of building.

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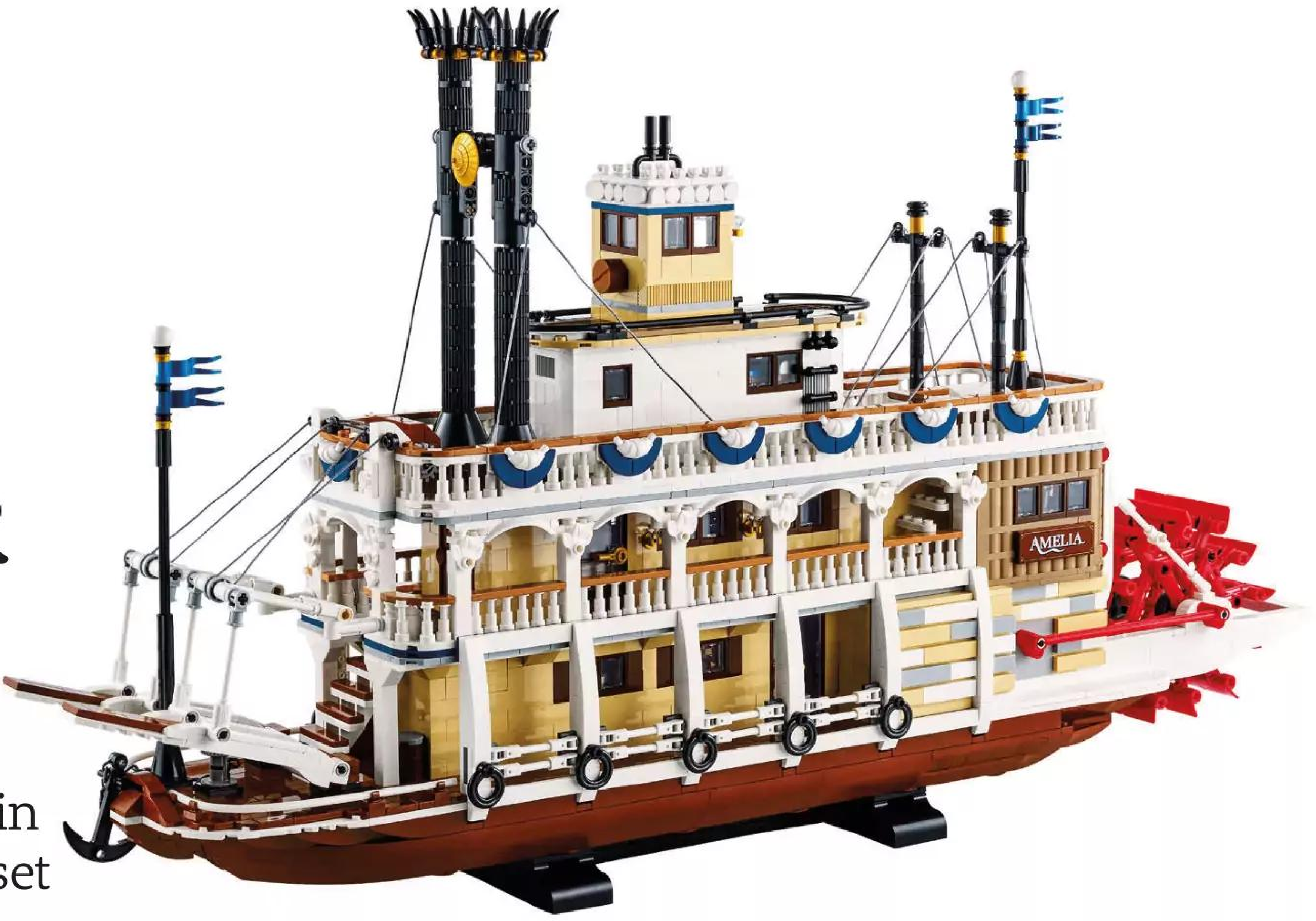
IDEAS Latest

HEADING DOWNRIVER ON A STEAMBOAT

Cruise along the Mississippi in style aboard the latest Ideas set



The newest set from LEGO Ideas is also the theme's largest ever model — 21356 River Steamboat clocks in at 4,090 pieces, beating out the previous record holder, 21330 Home Alone, by 135 bricks. And all of those pieces are put to good use, as the finished model is an impressive 69cm (27in) long.

There's no particular historical steamboat that 21356 seeks to replicate, instead going for the general vibe of the classic vessels, with their intricate balconies and iconic paddle in the back. The paddle spins thanks to a replica steam engine and the rudder can be controlled from the ship's wheel. More static details include colourful flags, fancy railings and plenty of rigging.

Inside, fans will find that this steamboat has been converted from its original purpose to be home to both tours and a museum experience. Removing each deck will reveal these interior details, including a pilothouse, crew cabin, restaurant and steam engine museum. A new part means the decks can be removed without disturbing the model's function.

"When researching the model, we decided to add a steam engine museum to showcase the history of engines throughout the centuries," said LEGO Ideas Designer Marina Stampoli. "The museum also houses the actual boat's steam engine, which is connected to the stern paddle, the most iconic element of steamboats. You can admire the mechanics at work, while pushing the boat around."

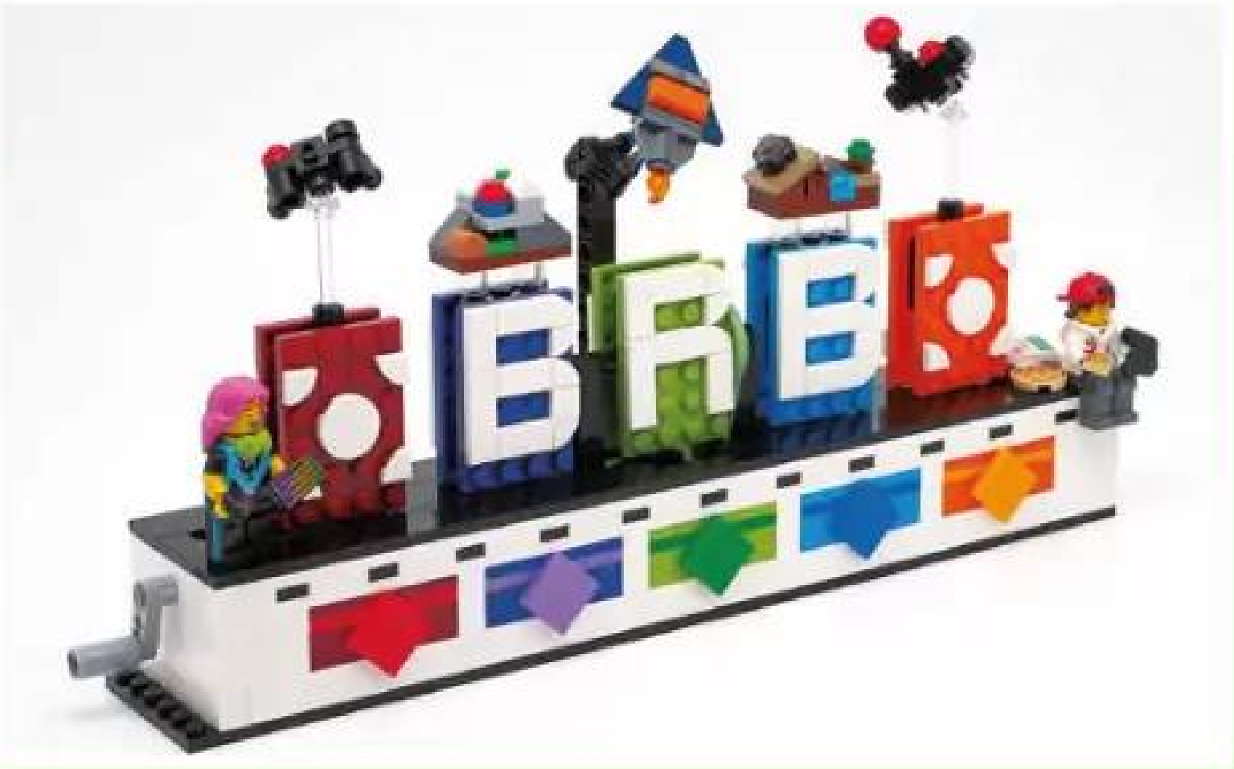
Though professional LEGO designers ensured that 21356 hit the water, the original concept and design came from a fan – Aaron Hall. Even after going through the official design process, the essence of the model is still very much his.

"Growing up along the Mississippi River, I developed a deep interest in paddle boats, which naturally inspired me to create this steamboat model," Aaron said. "The design process involved researching images to capture the essence of steamboats and selecting specific LEGO elements to bring my vision to life. I was determined to scale the model for minifigures and incorporate modular boat hull bases as a nod to the classic LEGO pirate ships."

Despite his version being minifigure scale, the final version is not intended to be compatible with the little LEGO people. But it does come with a simple stand to hold the set on display, so the paddle will spin freely no matter where the set is placed.

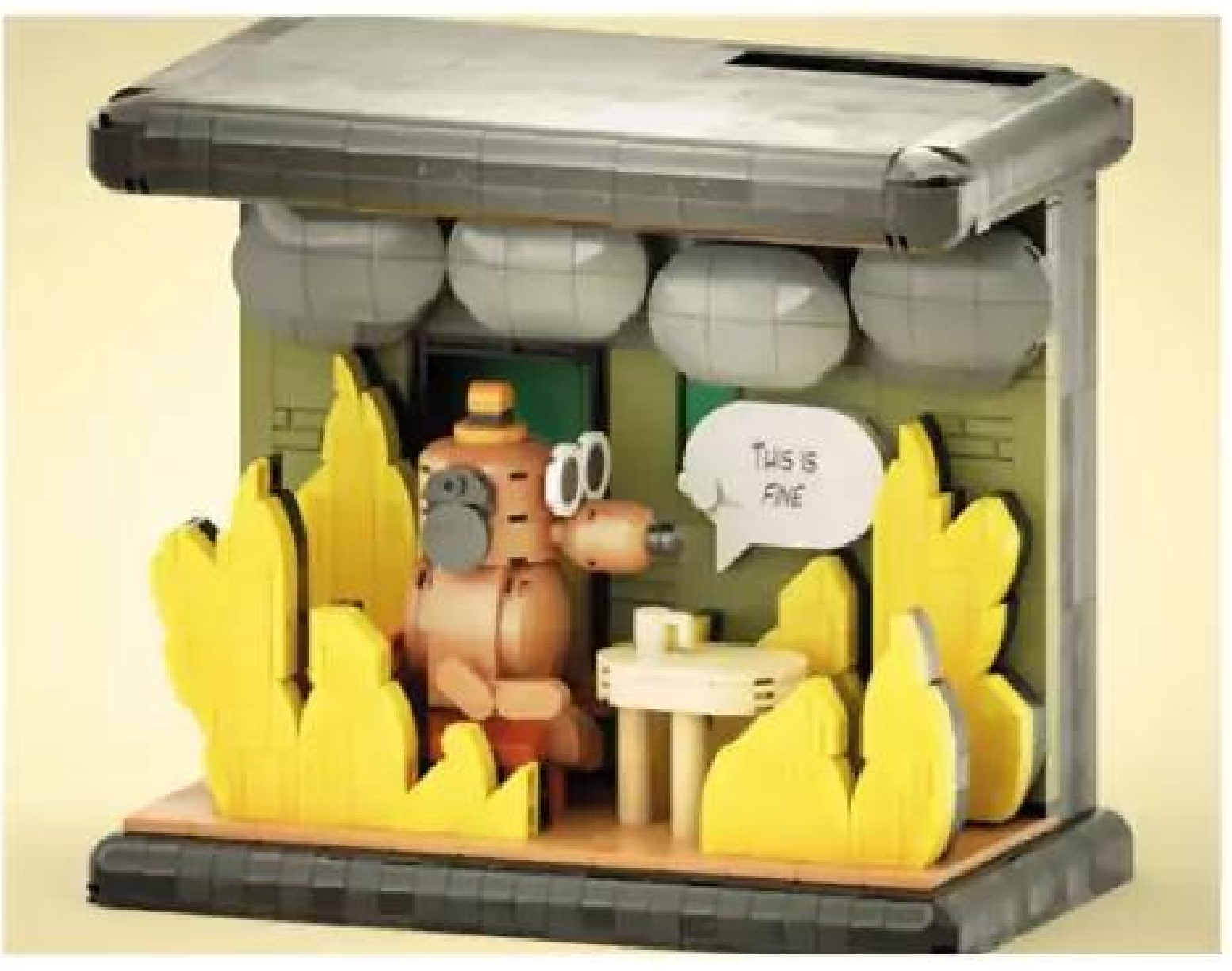
RYAN EVERLETH

Winning build



8mm-plastic's In the Gaming Zone might not have won the 'Be Right Back' Gaming Sign Challenge, but it is still a mighty fine runner up. The build is perfectly themed to gaming, with bright and flashy colours and mini models atop the letters representing all sorts of digital wonders — the spaceship and retro controller are particular standouts. But the model's biggest draw is its Technic mechanism that allows the letters to spin around — switching from "BRB" to "Gamez", letting the sign signal both when you need to step away and when you're set for an all-night gaming adventure.

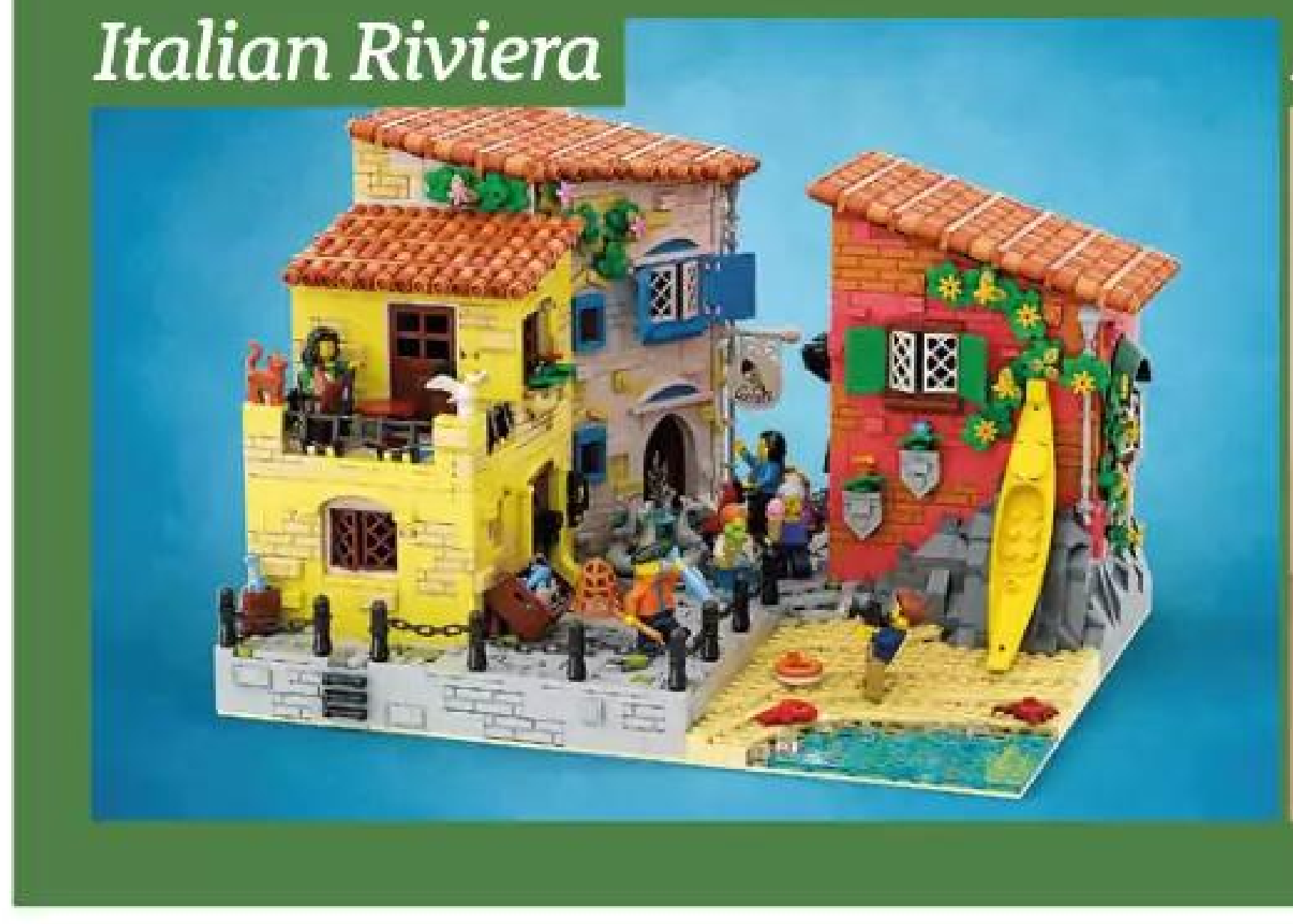
Gathering support



Making fake meme sets is common among online LEGO communities, but it's not every day that a meme is turned into an actual set. That's exactly what eat.sleep.build.repeat. hopes to accomplish with their idea, This is Fine. Based on the popular meme format, the model features a wide-eyed dog sitting at the counter with his coffee while the shop burns down around him, calmly stating "this is fine." It's a simple-looking build based on a very simply drawn cartoon, yet the model packs in 1,061 pieces to create the dog, the flames and a complete wall and ceiling as a frame.

In the pipeline

Italian Riviera



Minifigure Gumball Machine

Charlie & the Chocolate Factory

Pixar Luxo Jr

PREHISTORIC BEASTS ARE BACK IN NEW JURASSIC WORLD SETS

Six new sets will accompany the Gareth Edwards-helmed entry in the neverending sci-fi/disaster movie franchise

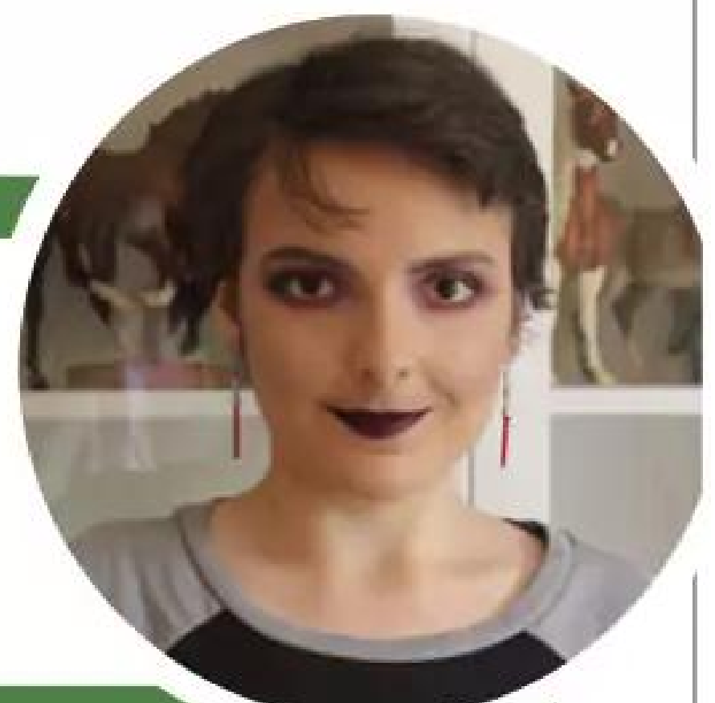
Even the conclusion of the Jurassic World trilogy wasn't enough to halt the dinosaur-themed mega franchise — the seventh film, Jurassic World Rebirth, is slated to hit theatres this summer, with six new LEGO sets launching about a month ahead of the theatrical release. Most of the sets are advertised as direct tie-ins to the film, though judgement on just how accurate they are will have to wait until after the creature feature is released.

76976 Spinosaurus & Quetzalcoatlus Air Mission is the wave's largest set, with 984 pieces and two moulded dinosaur figures. The Spinosaurus is sure to be a draw for fans of the original films, as this set is the first appearance in the brick for Jurassic Park III's antagonist since 2001 (and LEGO dinosaurs have come a long way since then). Rebirth's main cast of characters are all present as well, including Scarlett Johansson's character Zora and Mahershala Ali's Duncan.

76974 Brick-Built Mosasaurus Boat Mission is another set with an iconic creature, building the undersea menace and a hopelessly outmatched speedboat with 858 pieces. And beyond direct film tie-ins, 76970 Baby Dinosaur Dolores: Aquilops continues the line of adorable buildable baby dinos, joining the tiny T-Rex and miniature Ankylosaurus that have previously hatched.

RYAN EVERLETH

Kat's take



"There are finally new dinosaurs and new styles."

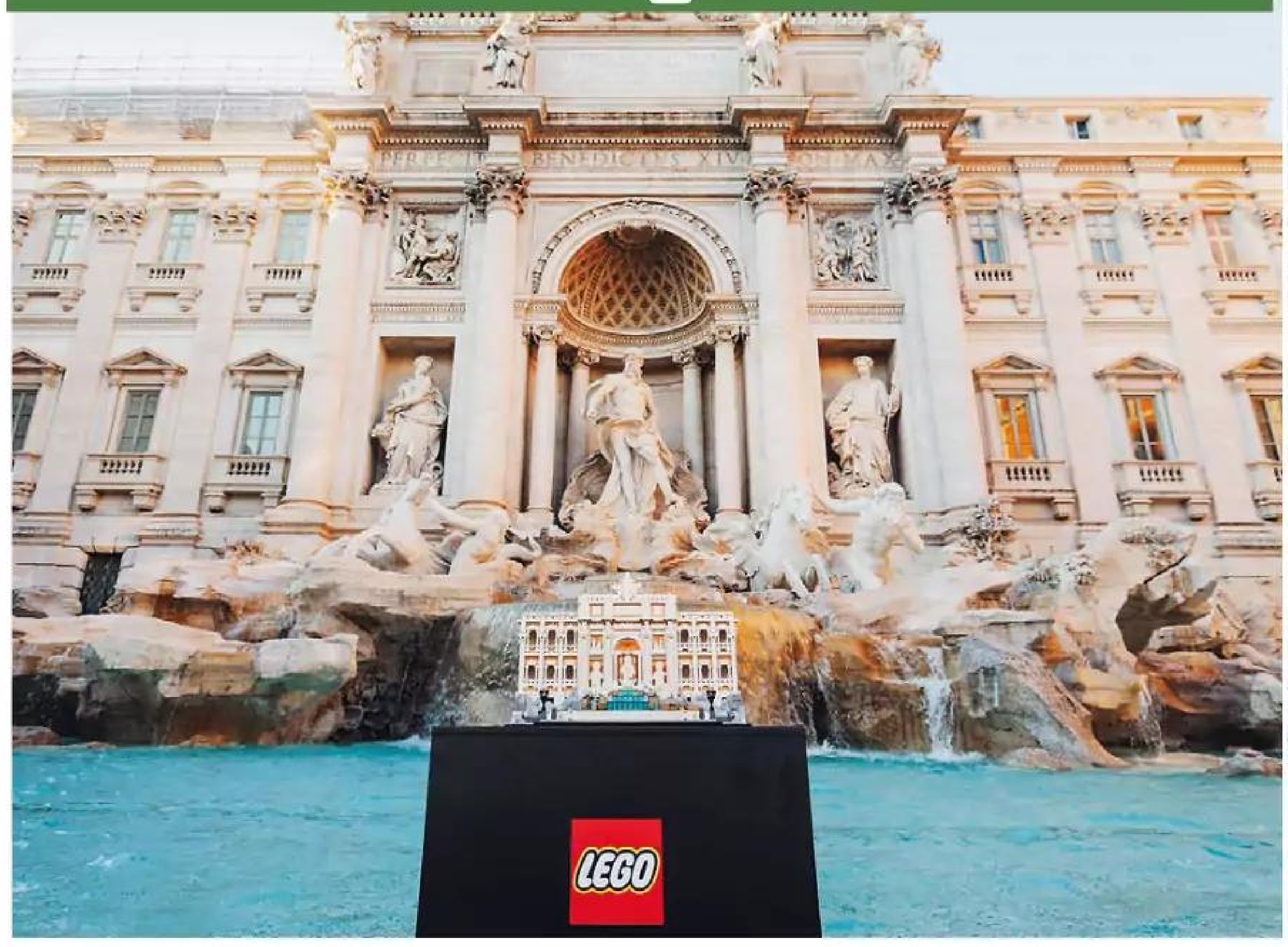
Even with the wild and wonderful stories across the Jurassic Park and Jurassic World series, the accompanying LEGO sets can appear very samey. As a result, when the new Jurassic World: Rebirth sets were revealed I actually felt excited about the theme for the first time in a long while.

There are finally new dinosaurs and new styles. Spinosaurus happens to be my favourite dinosaur species – regardless of Jurassic Park III – because of its incredible pescatarian hunting style in water. The new mould in 76976 Spinosaurus & Quetzalcoatlus Air Mission looks absolutely amazing and very similar to how paleontologists believe the dinosaur actually appeared. Its elongated snout and raised nostrils are perfect and similar to modern crocodilians.

Then there's the brick-built Mosasaurus, which is refreshingly different to previous sets. Although LEGO moulds work well for dinosaurs, this new set proves that they can be made entirely from bricks just as effectively. The mosasaurus looks reasonably anatomically accurate.

And no two sets in this wave look the same. They all focus on different aspects of the upcoming movie, and while this is likely due to the limited resources Universal Pictures has shared with the LEGO design team, it has still resulted in a selection where each set offers something unique. Getting every model will actually feel rewarding because it's not going to result in a small army of duplicate T. Rexes and Velociraptors that slightly vary in tones of brown. Having an Aquilops, Titanosaurus, and Spinosaurus in a single wave is something I could only have dreamed for until now.

News in pictures

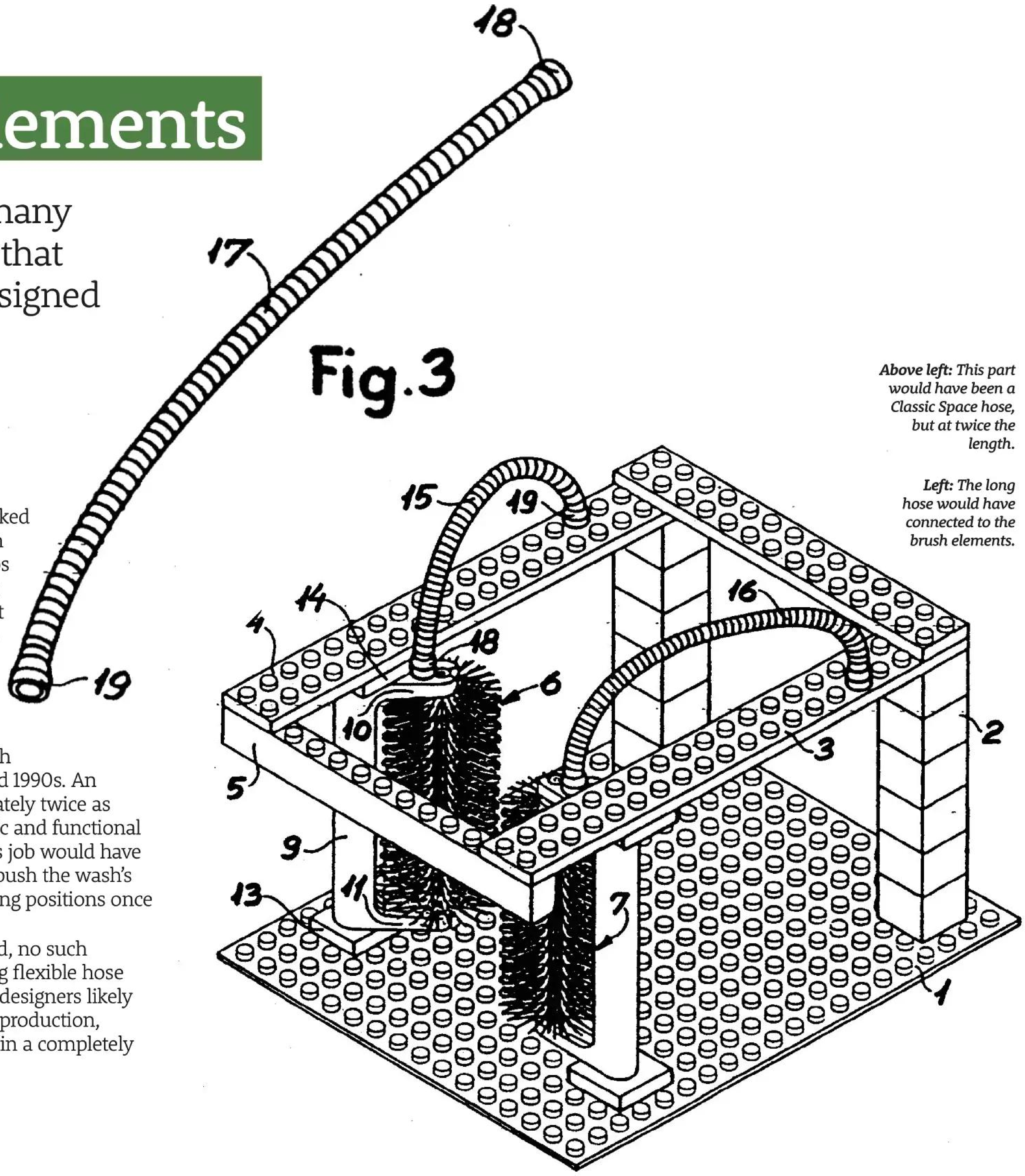


***Left:** The LEGO Group launched 21062 Trevi Fountain at the actual Trevi Fountain in Rome, Italy.*

***Right:** 10335 The Endurance has landed in Antarctica — the site of the real ship's ill-fated mission — thanks to u/vosper on Reddit, a dedicated LEGO fan working at McMurdo Station in Antarctica.*

The Lost Elements

Blocks delves into the many elements and products that the LEGO Group has designed but never released



Above left: *This part would have been a Classic Space hose, but at twice the length.*

Left: *The long hose would have connected to the brush elements.*

EXTRA-LONG CLASSIC HOSE

In the 1980s, the LEGO design team worked on a collection of elements for inclusion in 6394 Metro Park Service Tower and perhaps other similar sets that would come after. It was the first ever LEGO car wash and most of the pieces developed made their way to the finished box.

Not all of them ultimately appeared in 6394 though. Classic Space had debuted a flexible hose component that could connect to studs on both ends, which appeared in dozens of sets in the 1980s and 1990s. An extra-long version of that hose, approximately twice as long, was developed to serve both aesthetic and functional purposes. Dubbed an 'elastic connector,' its job would have been to provide a spring force that would push the wash's rotating brushes back to their forward-facing positions once a car had gone through the contraption.

When Metro Park Service Tower debuted, no such element was included. Instead, the existing flexible hose piece from Classic Space was utilised. The designers likely found that this part, which was already in production, worked well enough rather than investing in a completely new element.

SCREEN BRICKS

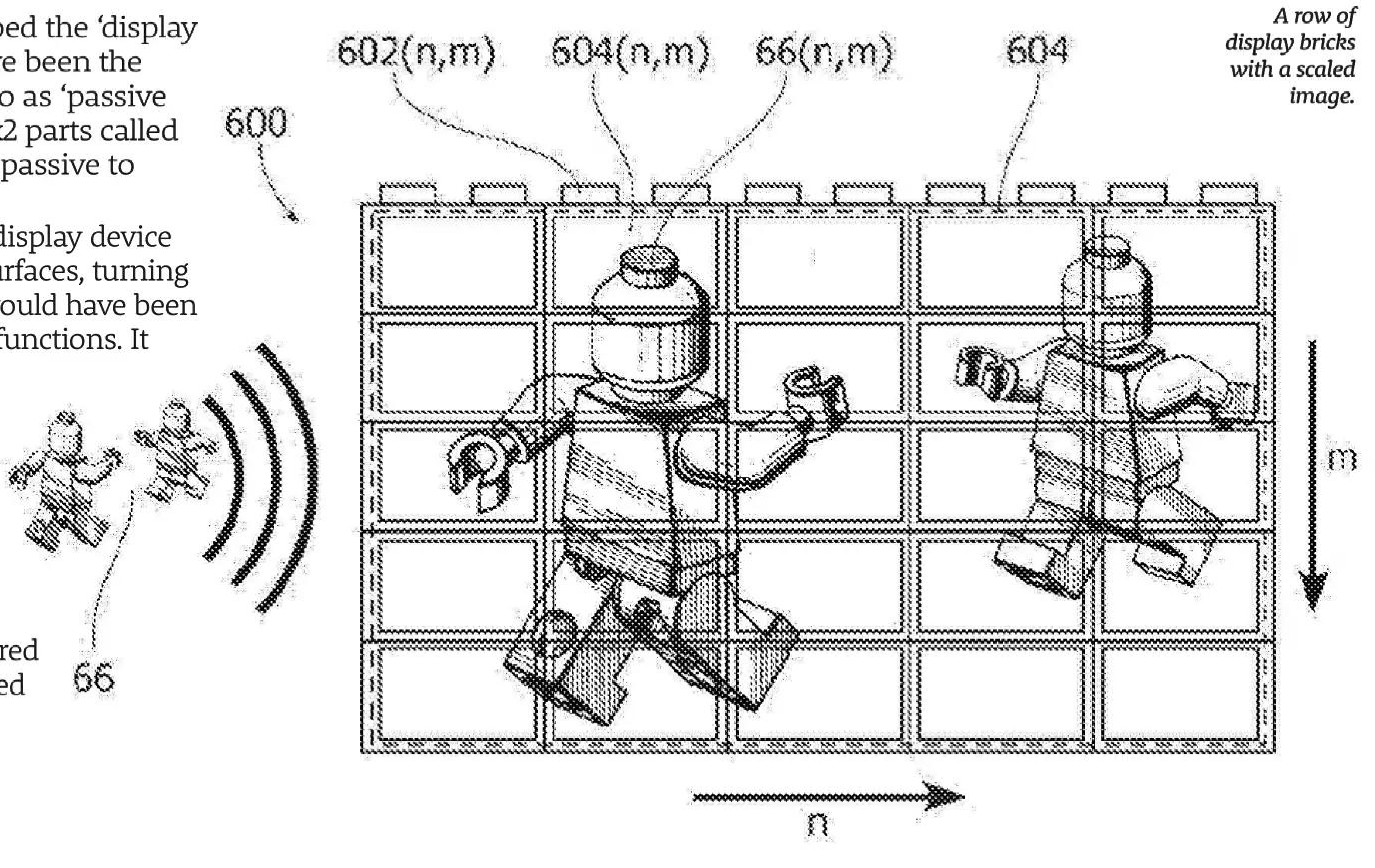
If you can't beat them, join them. That appears to have been the thinking leading up to 2019. The LEGO Group has long had to compete with digital alternatives for children's attention, with screens being a major threat. Multiple product lines have sought to incorporate phones and computers into play, but this idea bypassed those to merge bricks and screens into a single unit.

Designers proposed a new type of brick dubbed the 'display toy construction element.' Their size would have been the same as standard LEGO components, referred to as 'passive toy construction elements,' with 2x2, 2x4 and 1x2 parts called out specifically as candidates for upgrade from passive to display status.

Each of these pieces would have an electronic display device incorporated onto the face of one of their outer surfaces, turning the brick into a tiny, flat screen TV. These bricks would have been supported by a signal processor serving multiple functions. It would receive image or video data, detect how many display elements were connected (thus knowing the size of screen available), then scale images to display across all the available bricks. Ultimately, the system proposed was essentially a minifigure scale version of an adjustable jumbotron.

This represents an incredibly bold idea. It is possible that some variant of it is still being explored and products based on this concept will be released sometime in the future. However, it is difficult to imagine how the display bricks described in this document could be sold economically or how the functionality they would provide would be any better than a proper screen-based device. Such issues are probably why nothing has come of this idea in the five years since it was patented.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI



A row of display bricks with a scaled image.

Better than gold?

Matt Chiles shares his wisdom from the block market floor, cutting through the many myths around investing in and reselling LEGO sets

My father-in-law has a coin collection that he amassed long ago and he is now starting the process of liquidating. I think there is something for us LEGO investors to learn here.

Coins are much more liquid than LEGO sets. In fact, there are services that will encase your coin in a sealed plastic container after grading it. Once that is done it is easy to list the coin and the buyer knows exactly what they are getting. It sounds easy.

Well, the problem is trying to do this when you are in the second half of your ninth decade. Pa's vision isn't want it used to be and it is rapidly declining – it is difficult to fill out grading forms when you can't see the fine print. His hearing has also declined, so he can't hear the answer when he asks questions of the grading company, so something as simple as grading and selling coins becomes a struggle with age.

So what about your LEGO collection? Do you have a plan so that you are not spending your greying years trying to figure out the latest technology to get the best price in a fickle market? As I watch Pa struggle with his coins, I am reminded that I need to have a final disposition plan for my collection.

My friend Wayne Hussey has been working on a disposition plan for his vast collection for a while. Wayne has been active in the LEGO community for at least as long as me – he is old enough to remember when things like the wheel were the great new innovation. He and his wife Terri have been huge contributors to the hobby in the Seattle area, where they were instrumental in getting the world's longest running convention, BrickCon, up and running.

Sometimes the value in your collection isn't the monetary value, but the value it can bring to others. Wayne has built some great MOCs over the years – the kind that are huge and glorious and were not really ever intended to be taken apart. So what do you do with creations like that? In the case of his minifigure scale 37,000 piece replica of the Washington State ferry Issaquah, it recently found a new home on board the actual ferry Issaquah.

I asked him about the process. The LEGO ferry's former home at a waterfront museum in Seattle had been redeveloped and after a few emails, the state ferries were interested. The state built a display case and arranged for installation of the 45kg model when the real ferry was being serviced.

According to Wayne, it is essentially a 'long term loan'. It will probably last for the life of the ferry, which will likely be another 20 years or more. After that, Wayne doesn't know what will happen to it, but he trusts that it will be okay.

What about compensation? This creation has a street value of around £3,100 in brick alone. A LEGO artist friend of mine once told me you should charge at least quadruple the piece value for a MOC commission, to cover the labour. This would value the ferry at around £12,340 or more.

But the important thing for Wayne isn't the money. It is that his artwork is seen and admired. It is important that it inspire another generation of fans – children and adults alike.

Wayne's 4.25-metre-tall Space Needle model is similarly on display in the gift shop at the Space Needle in Seattle. His only payment is an occasional free trip up the elevator to the viewing deck 200 meters above the street. He is working on similar long-term homes for some of his other large MOCs.

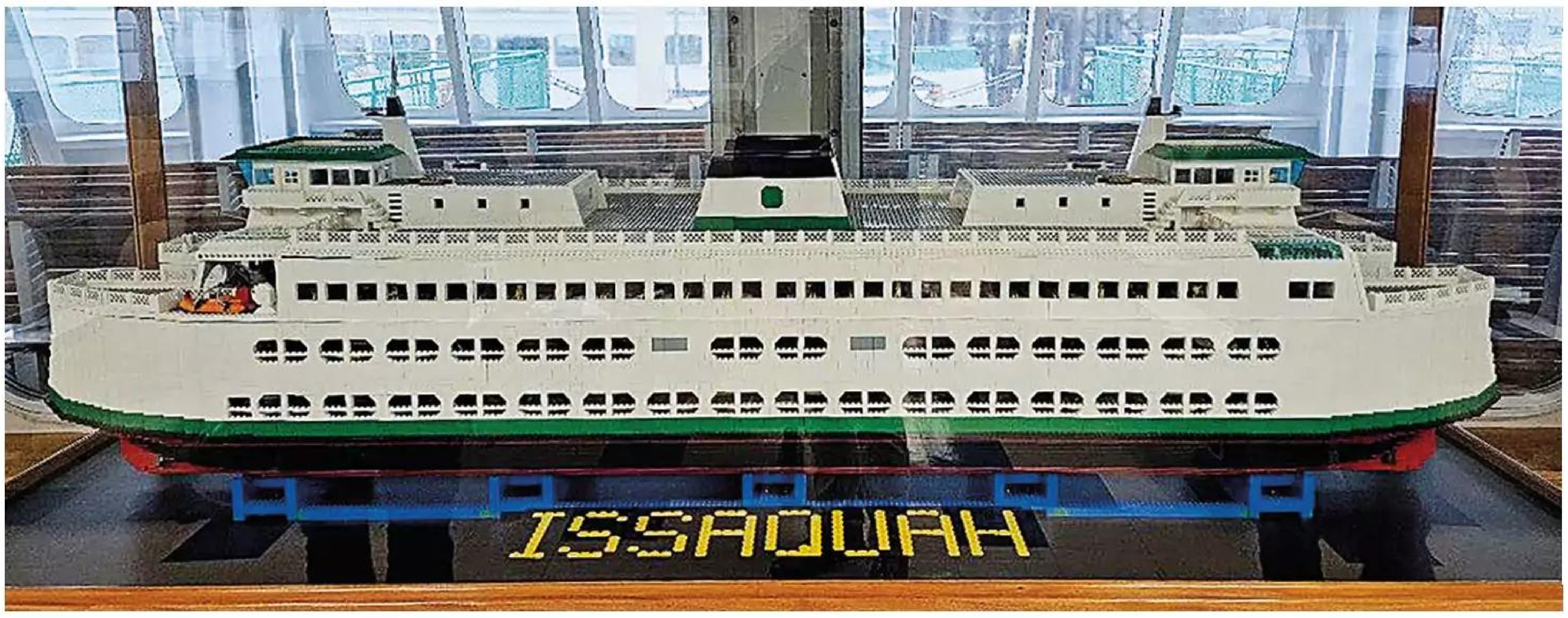
So what is my point in these rambling tales? We are all getting older. Some of us are getting older sooner than others, but 20 years flies by. Last year was my 30th year in the AFOL community. In another 30 years I don't want to still be trying to get rid of the LEGO bricks that I have accumulated over the last 50 plus years and the next 30 years, so I had better start planning for it now.

My neighbours recently started 'Swedish death cleaning'. The idea is that you declutter now so that your heirs are not burdened with it later. Us AFOLs should take heed unless you like the idea of your MISB sets going at garage sale prices and your piece collections being dumped in a Goodwill bin!

As for the coin saga with Pa – it is moving along. He told me he can't die until he has sold all of his coins, so I told him to take his time. And as for the LEGO builds – the ferry Issaquah is now on the run to my old hometown, so I think it is time I pay a visit to the old stomping ground.

Don't forget to play with your LEGO bricks – because you only live once.

MATT CHILES



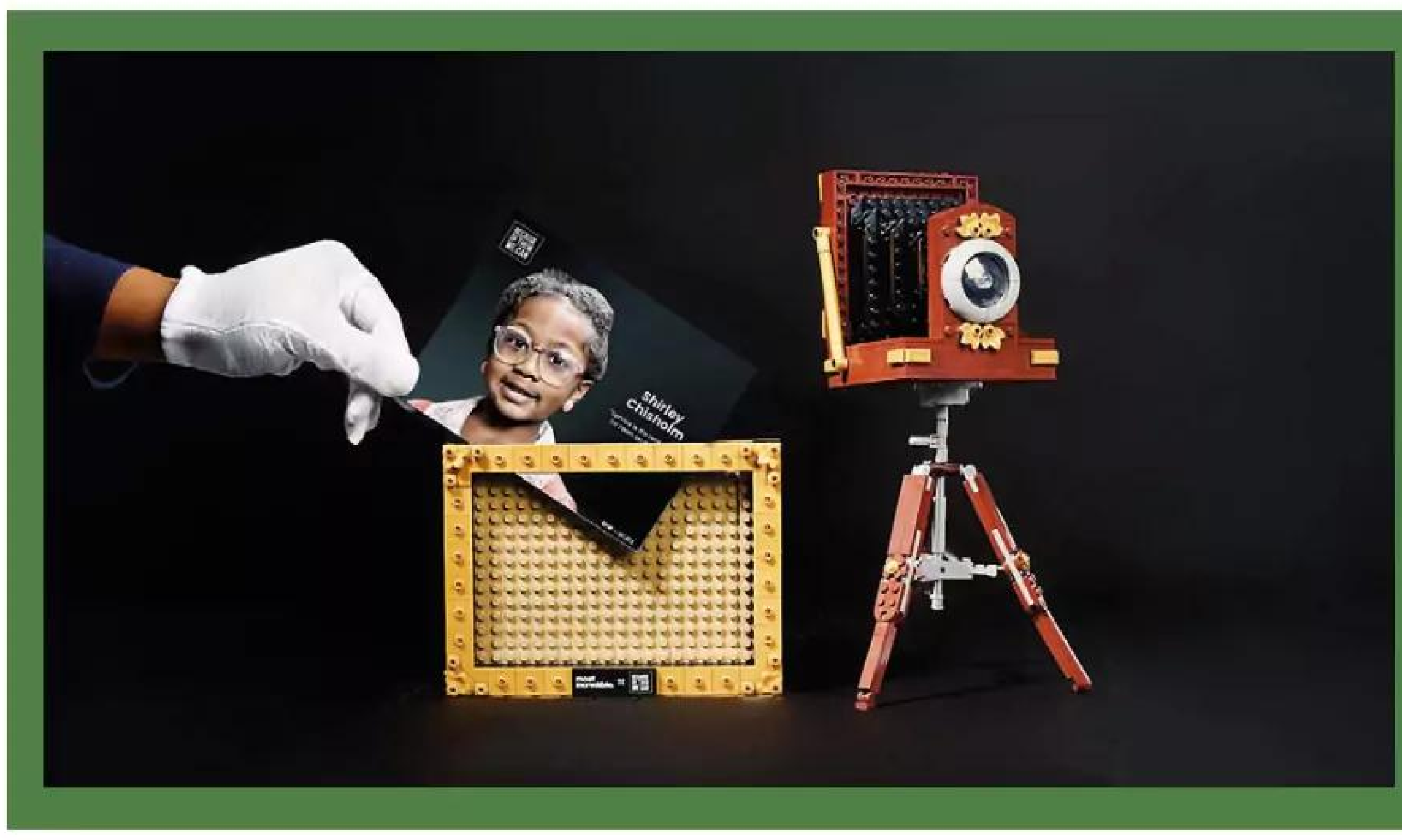
The information in this column about plastic bricks is not intended to constitute – and should not be construed as – investment advice.

In other news...

Rounding up the rest of the month's news from the world of LEGO bricks

DEEP SEA DELIGHTS AT LEGOLAND

LEGOLAND Windsor welcomed back the popular Deep Sea Adventure ride in February, giving fans a glimpse at marine-themed LEGO builds made of over 200,000 bricks, as well as hundreds of real-life creatures. To celebrate, the park brought in Jenny Stock, British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2024, who helped put the finishing touches on the revamped submarine ride. "I jumped at the chance to collaborate with LEGOLAND Windsor Resort on the resurfacing of Deep Sea Adventure as it perfectly aligns with my passion for marine life, creativity and my desire to share that wonder with others," Jenny said.

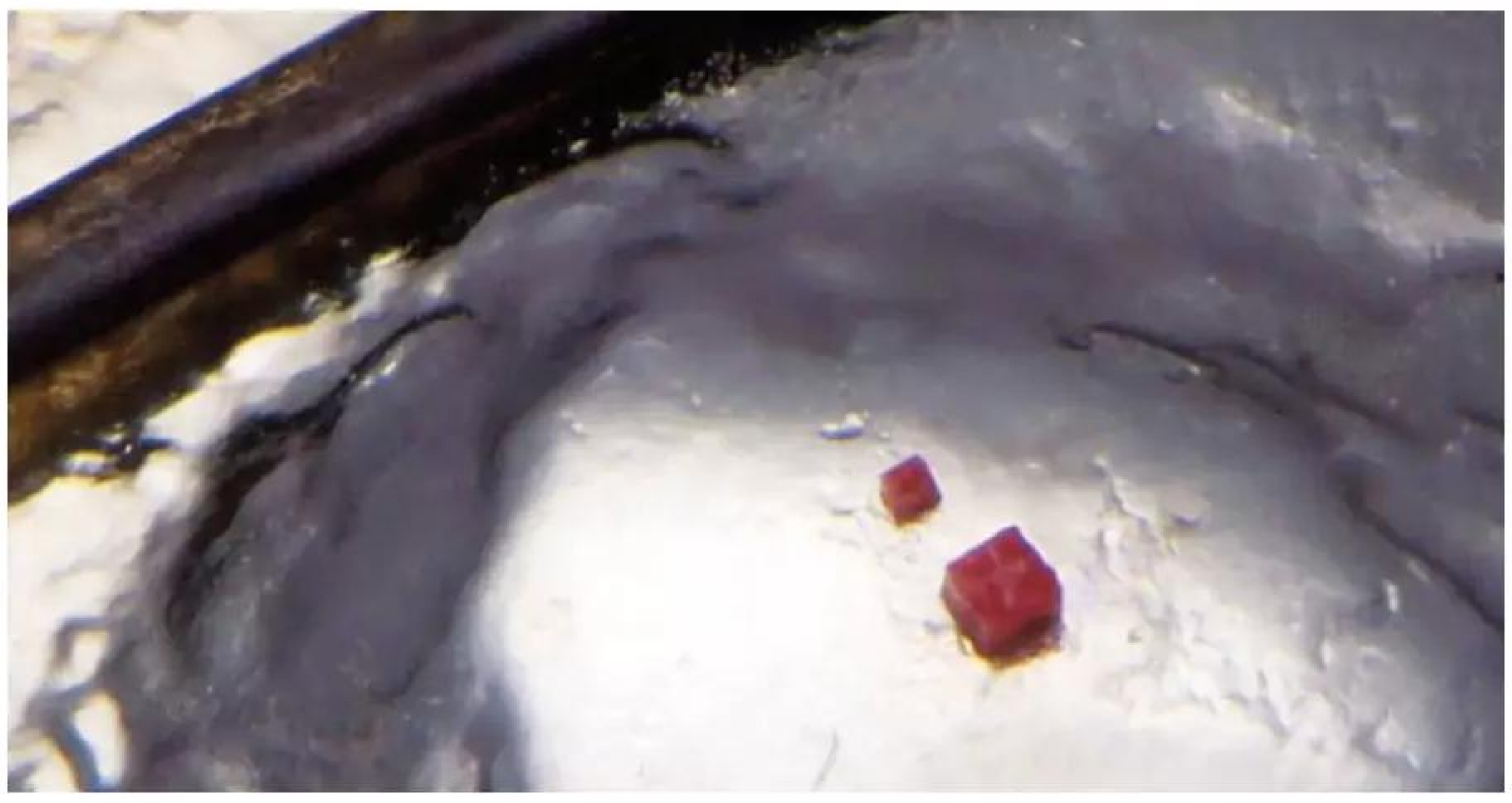


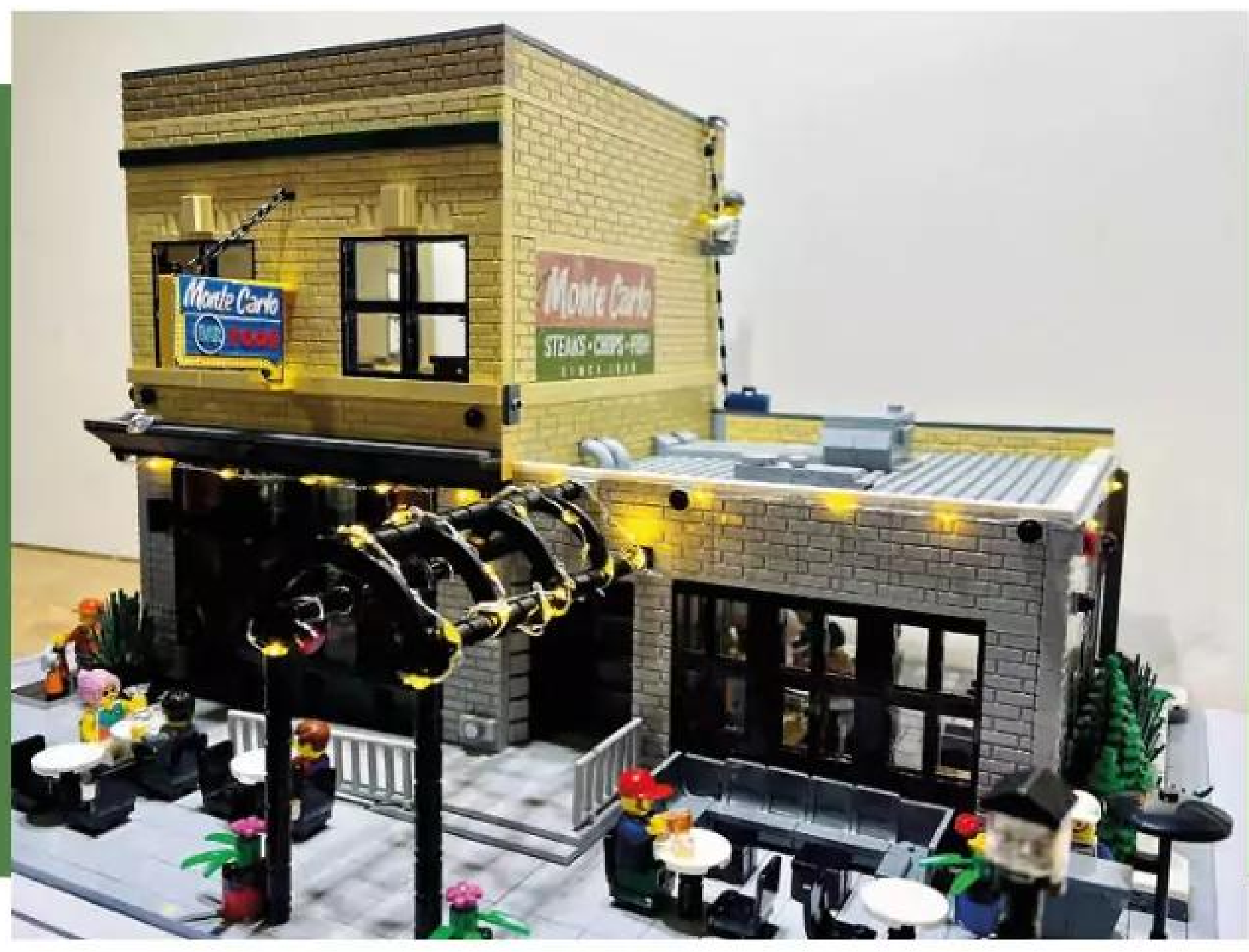
CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY

Because of Them We Can, a site dedicated to sharing Black history, and Most Incredible Studio, a Black-owned studio specialising in custom LEGO sets, collaborated to make an unofficial set to celebrate Black History Month this past February. The set, titled 'Because of You: Legacy In Focus' features an old-style camera and photo frame that can be filled with any picture of the builder's choice. "In many ways, my existence is a testament to the power of photography," said Syreeta Gates, founder of Most Incredible Studio. "To now create something that honours the legacy of Black photography... feels like a full-circle moment."

BLOOD-SIZED MICRO BRICKS

Artist David A. Lindon broke the Guinness World Record for smallest handmade sculpture with his LEGO brick replica. The sculpture is so tiny that it had to be measured by a light microscope, clocking in at 0.02517 mm by 0.02184 mm — that's about the same size as a human blood cell. "The challenge to create tiny objects that can't be seen without a microscope is demanding both physically and mentally," said David. "I have trained myself to slow my breathing and work between the beats of my heart. Even the pulse of my heart beating through my fingers creates too much movement."





LOCAL LEGO LANDMARKS

Jeff Esler, a LEGO fan from Minneapolis, has taken to building some of his favourite spots around the city as LEGO models and displaying them in his local coffee shop. The coffee shop is one of the places recreated in the brick, accurately capturing the building's red brick exterior and welcoming interior. Jeff even gave it an extra personal touch, putting minifigure versions of himself and his fellow regulars at their usual table. "I call it the last supper," Jeff said. "It's a bunch of us sitting around this table and you can kind of recognise who the minifigures are."

THERAPEUTIC BUILDING SESSIONS

Loretta Veney found that after her mother's dementia diagnosis, building with LEGO bricks was a way for the two of them to still spend time together and bond. Seeing the success with her mother, Loretta decided to spread the joy of LEGO building to other people living with dementia and has found it helps to bring out long-forgotten memories from lives well lived. "It's really about having joy with them, and even if they don't get it right, it doesn't matter," she said. "There's no right or wrong way to do it. That's what my mother would say."

RYAN EVERLETH

ART AGAINST ALZ

Blocks COMPETITION!

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THE HISTORIC DOCKYARD CHATHAM

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Good luck!

THE HISTORIC DOCKYARD CHATHAM

BRICK WRECKS

SUNKEN SHIPS IN LEGO® BRICKS

EXHIBITION PRODUCED BY

MUSEUM AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

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Ryan McNaught

LEGO Certified Professional

This competition is open to anyone who subscribes to a Blocks Magazine subscription, except employees of the Promoter, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the Promotion. Each participant can only enter once during the Promotion Period. The competition will be open from 9.00am (BST) on May 2, 2025 to 5:00pm May 30, 2025 (the "Promotion Period"). Any entries outside of the Promotion Period will not be counted. One overall competition winner will be chosen by the Publisher of Blocks Magazine. The decision of the Promoter in relation to the Promotion is final. No correspondence will be entered into. No information regarding entries or judging will be disclosed to any third party not involved in the conduct of the Promotion. The prize is not transferable, re-saleable or exchangeable. There is no cash alternative. The promoter reserves the right to substitute any of the prize products subject to availability. Winners will be announced in a future issue of Blocks magazine and on our social media pages. Winners must respond to notification of their prize within 48 hours otherwise the right to claim the prize will be lost and the promoter reserves the right to re-award the prize(s). No entries from agents, third parties, organised groups or applications automatically generated by computers will be accepted. No incomplete or corrupted entries will be accepted. Any entries not in accordance with the entry instructions will be rejected. Any entries containing offensive or inappropriate content will be removed. By entering participants will be deemed to have accepted and be bound by the rules. All entry instructions form part of these Terms and Conditions. In the eventof unforeseen circumstances the Promoters reserve the right to offer alternative prizes of equal or greater value. The Promoter reserves the right to amend, alter or terminate this promotion at any time due to circumstances beyond its control. The Promoter's decision is final and binding in all matters relating to the promotion. The Promoter can accept no responsibility for, and reserves the right to refuse, entries which are corrupt, incomplete or fail to arrive by the closing date. These rules are governed by English law and subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the English Courts. Promoter & Data Controller: **Silverback Publishing Ltd**

BRICK WRECKS

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THE HISTORIC DOCKYARD CHATHAM

Contest of the Month

IRON FORGE

The renowned LEGO seed part competition challenges builders to look at elements as they never have before

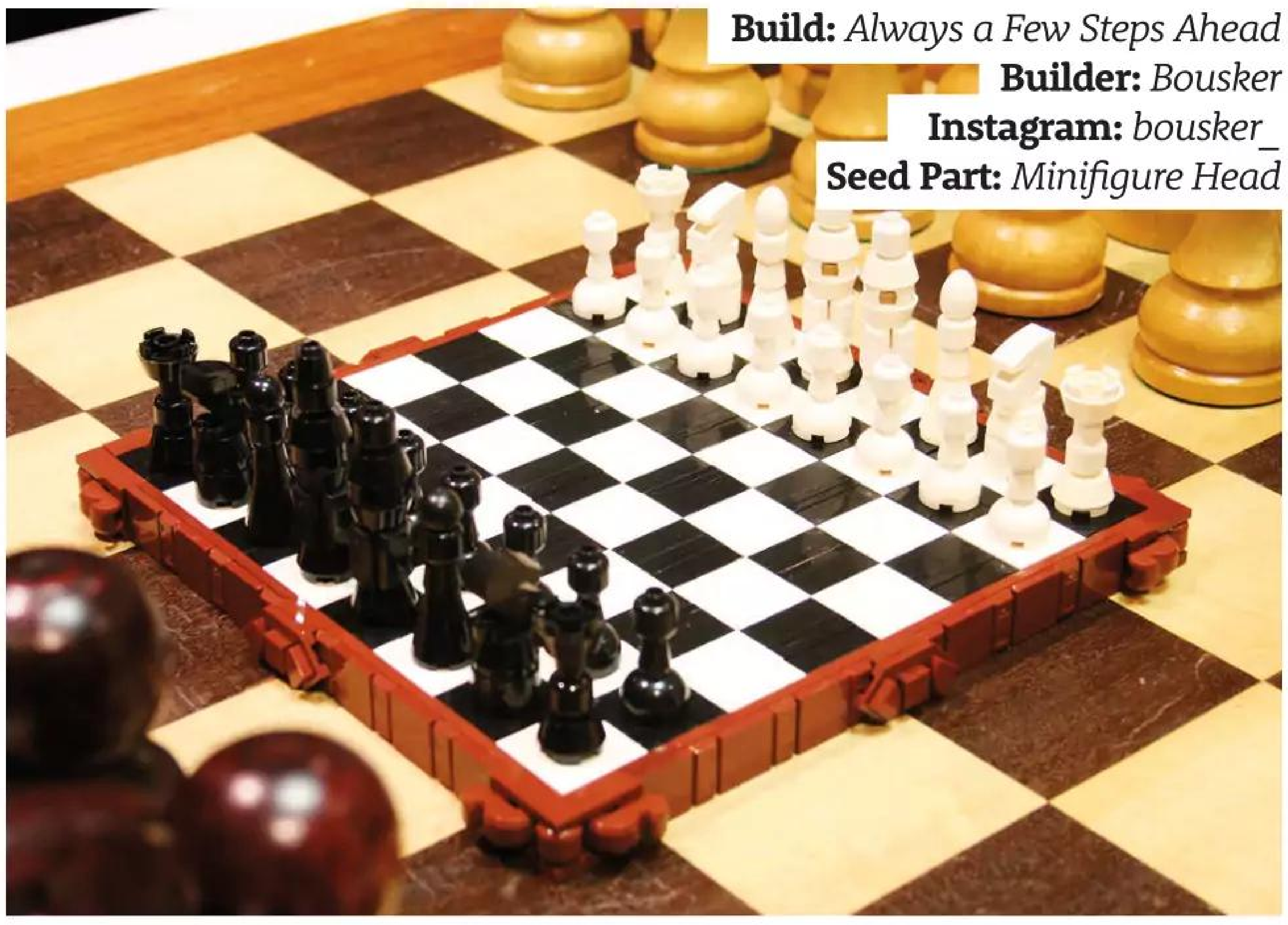
As the name implies, Iron Forge is not for the faint of heart. A grueling four-week competition sees builders face off in three bracketed rounds. The Forge is open to anyone with the guts to participate, but only the toughest builders will come out on top and earn a chance to later participate in the prestigious Iron Builder.

The premise of both Iron Forge and Iron Builder is simple; the organisers announce a seed part and then builders have a week or two to build everything they can think of using that piece. For Iron Forge, the organisers choose easily available parts, making these builds great sources of inspiration for anyone wanting to look at their collection in a different way. This year's seed parts included mud guards, minifigure heads and grass stalks, but you'll have to look closely to spot them in these creations...

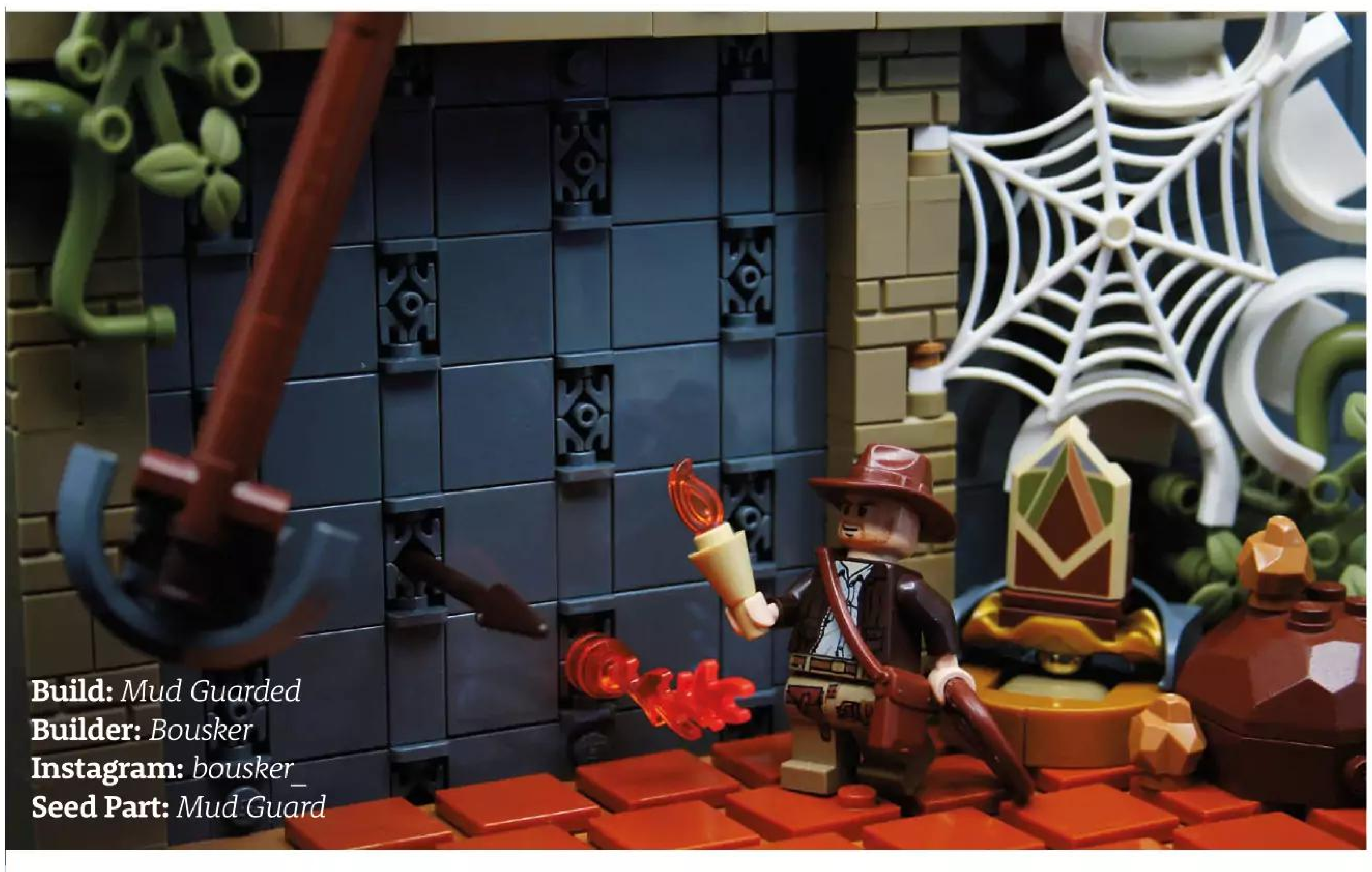
GENEVA DURAND

Get involved

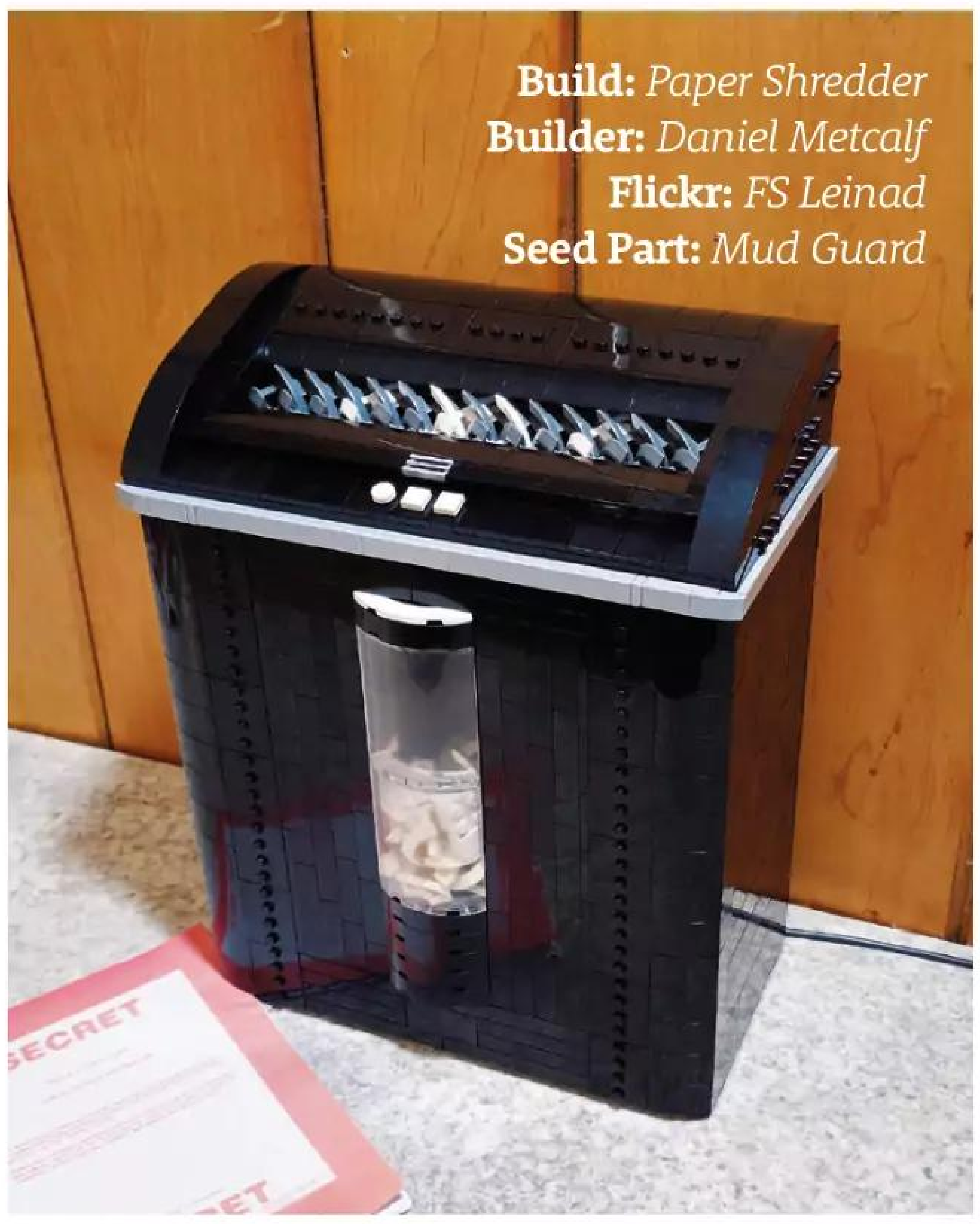
Website: *www.iron.builders*



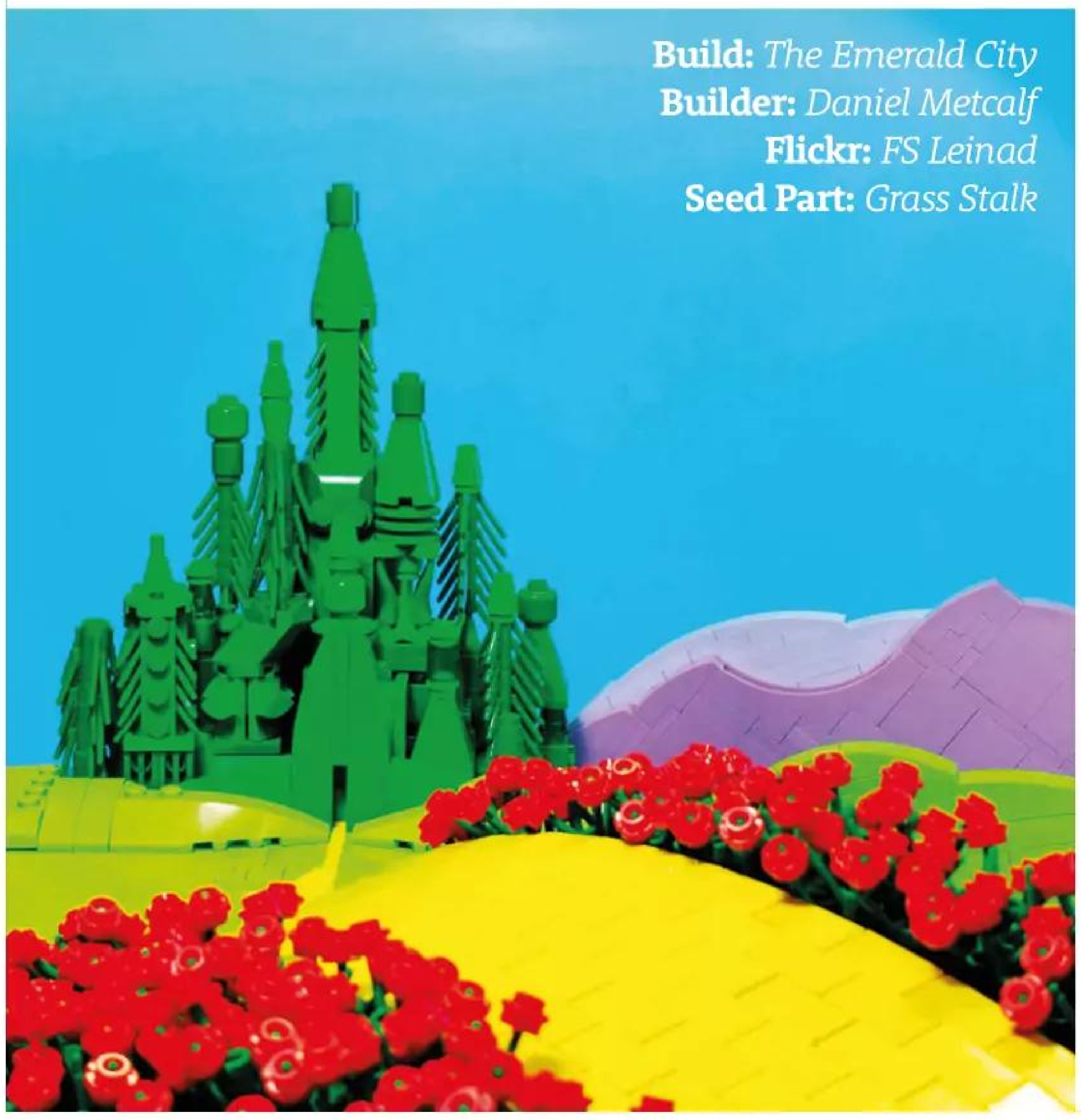
Build: *Always a Few Steps Ahead*
Builder: *Bousker*
Instagram: *bousker_*
Seed Part: *Minifigure Head*



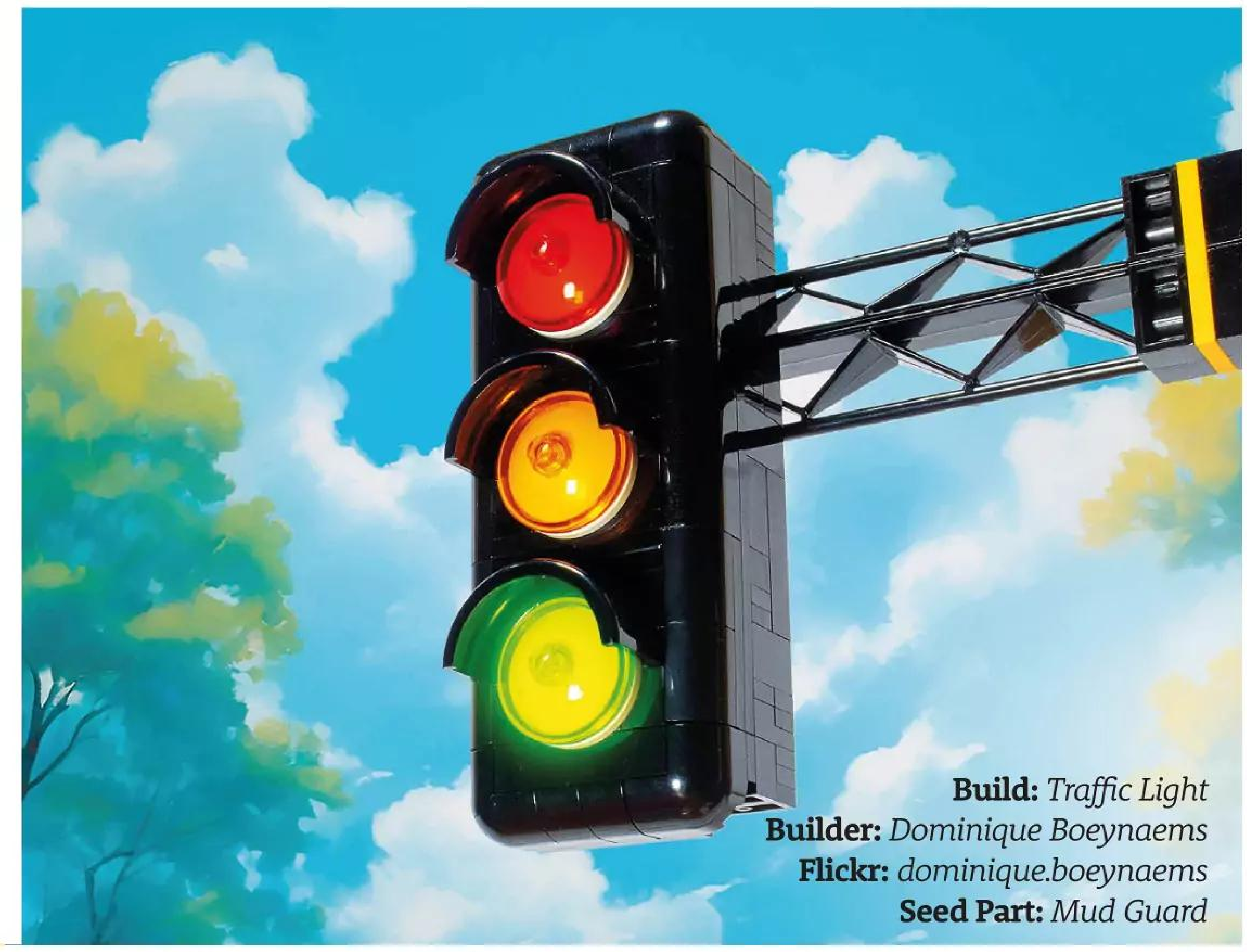
Build: *Mud Guarded*
Builder: *Bousker*
Instagram: *bousker_*
Seed Part: *Mud Guard*



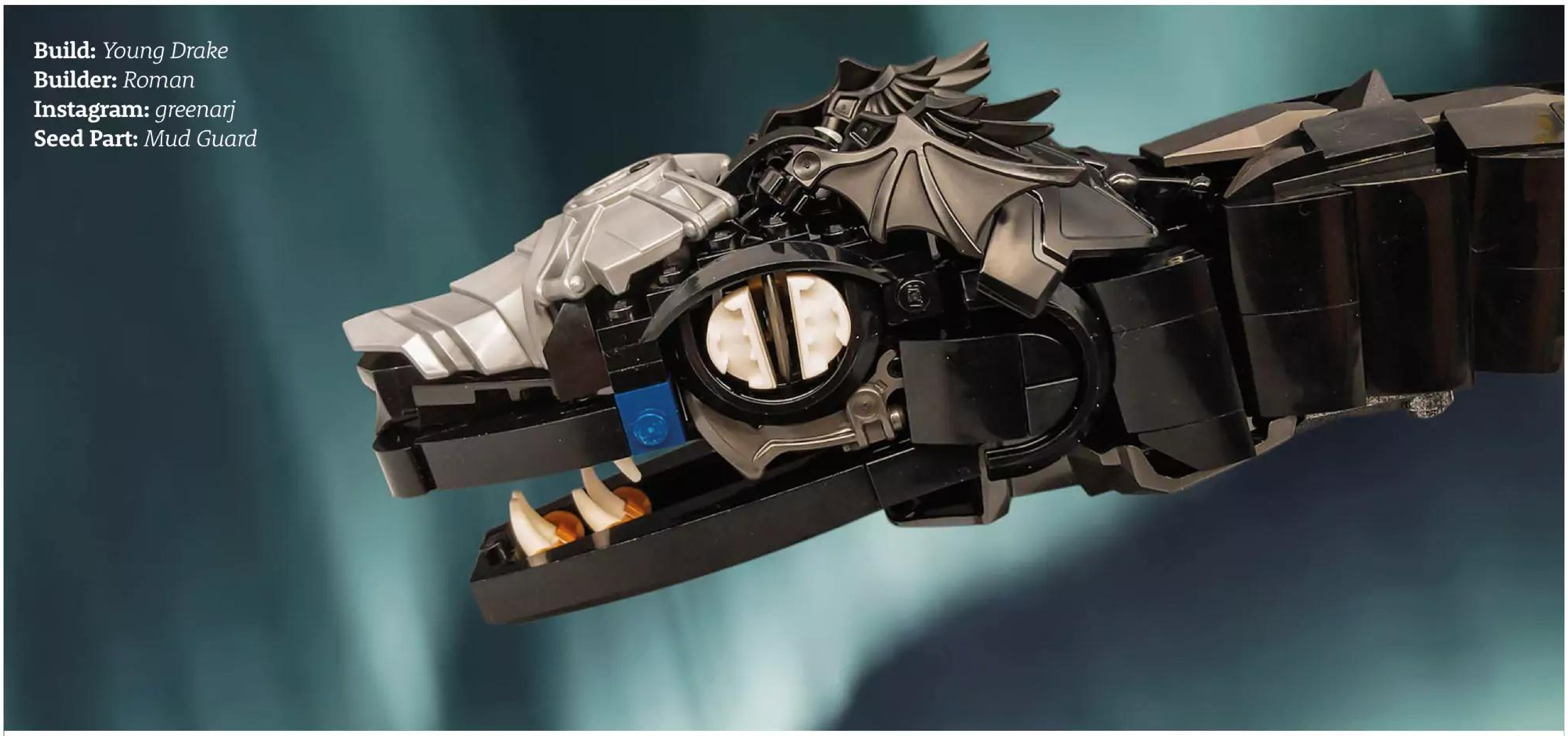
Build: *Paper Shredder*
Builder: *Daniel Metcalf*
Flickr: *FS Leinad*
Seed Part: *Mud Guard*



Build: *The Emerald City*
Builder: *Daniel Metcalf*
Flickr: *FS Leinad*
Seed Part: *Grass Stalk*



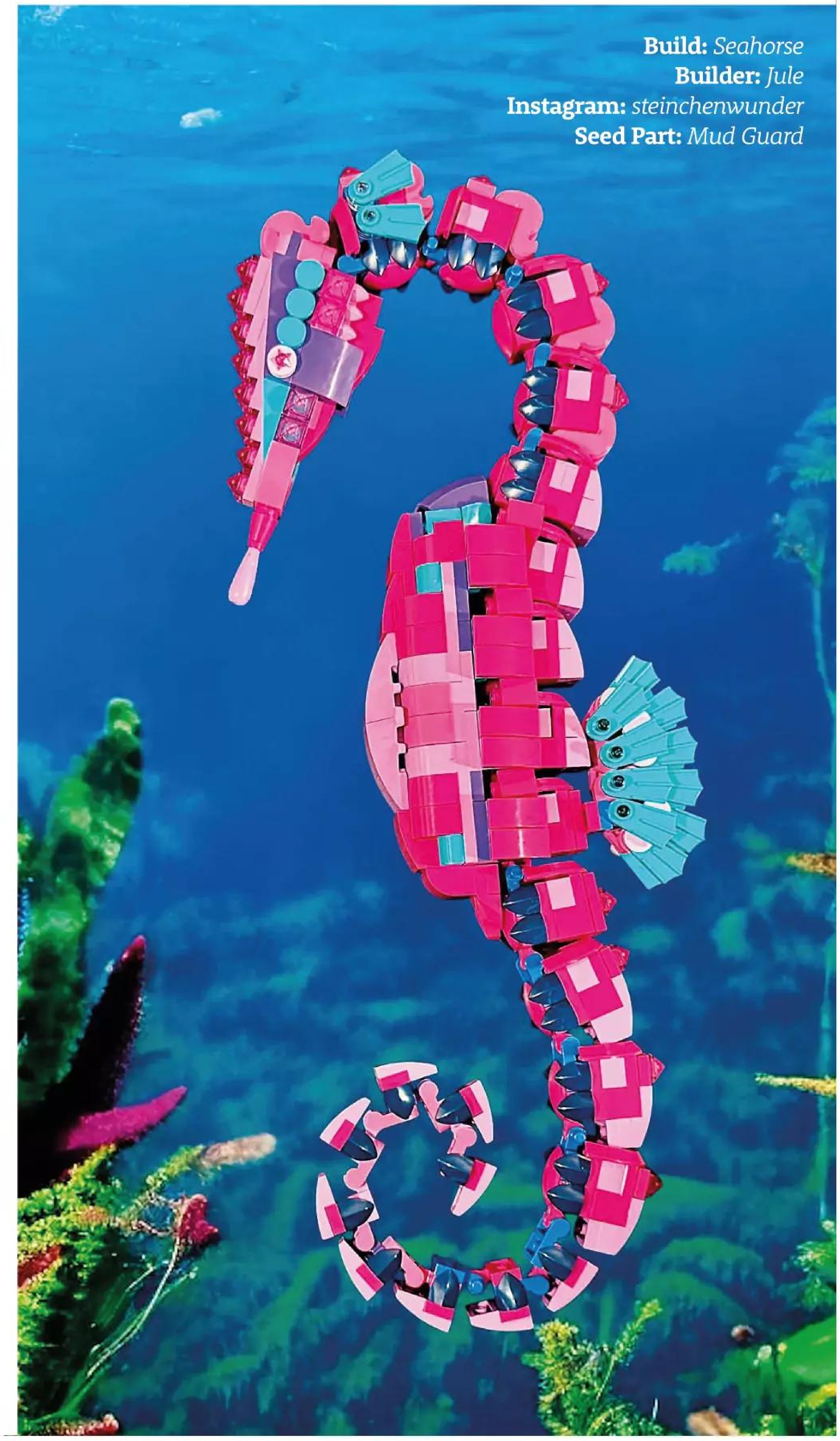
Build: *Traffic Light*
Builder: *Dominique Boeynaems*
Flickr: *dominique.boeynaems*
Seed Part: *Mud Guard*



Build: *Young Drake*
Builder: *Roman*
Instagram: *greenarj*
Seed Part: *Mud Guard*

Build: *A Precarious Position*
Builder: *Dominique Boeynaems*
Flickr: *dominique.boeynaems*
Seed Part: *Mud Guard*

Build: *Focus Time*
Builder: *Jonas Ens*
Instagram: *betabrick*
Seed Part: *Minifigure Head*



Build: *Seahorse*
Builder: *Jule*
Instagram: *steinchenwunder*
Seed Part: *Mud Guard*

Healing through LEGO bricks

Anna Nike Leskowsky describes the joy of discovering LEGO building later in life, during a time of particular adversity

As an elementary school teacher, I have always been aware of the joy my students were experiencing when they were building structures using LEGO blocks. There is no doubt in my mind that their education has been enhanced by having a variety of LEGO bricks in the classroom. However, during my more than two decades of teaching, I didn't reflect on the benefits of LEGO bricks for our overall health, cognitive gains in senior years or creativity at any age in our lifetime – until my serious health crises.

I was recovering from the bicuspid aortic valve replacement in my heart and overcoming polymyalgia rheumatica, one of the most painful autoimmune forms of rheumatism that led to my retirement from teaching, and to cheer me up my husband surprised me with a gift – a box of LEGO roses.

I waited a few days before I opened the box, secured LEGO pieces from one of the small packages on a tray and put the tray on the dining table. I followed the steps and built the first rose. This activity turned out to be very soothing. It felt as if my mind left my aching body and entered an imaginary rose garden. Piece by piece, the blooms were coming into focus like notes of music written down by a composer. I imagined myself being a creator of the most beautiful melody, the symphony of red roses. It took a few afternoons to make my first LEGO bouquet. At that moment, I felt that I'd accomplished something for the first time since I became sick.

The second set came as a gift from my daughter. Making wild spring flowers was not only very rewarding, but also reminded me of spring and summer, my favourite seasons when I have always enjoyed the outdoors, going for walks in forests, parks and gardens. I was making plans for my future, thinking less and less about the inconveniences of my illness.

Poinsettia was my third LEGO Botanicals gift. After I put the pieces together, I already felt much stronger and healthier. I looked at my colourful garden placed in the glass cabinet in our living room and I knew that the beauty of colours and shapes in this display would bring more to my life than just playing with LEGO elements. It encouraged me to be creative in my other projects, such as writing poetry and painting, which had naturally been difficult for me during my recovery.

I completed my contemporary painting inspired by LEGO blooms that combines the impressionistic nature of flowers with structured, clear, almost perfectionist features of human minds that have created LEGO blocks. I called my flowery creation a 'conscious garden', then gave the same title to my painting and one of my poems.

I feel healthy now and I am looking forward to my next LEGO creation. Flowers are my first choice, but I fantasise about LEGO jewellery, LEGO tea sets and still life paintings, complemented by poetry. Picking up the pieces and giving them a new, healthy form of existence surprised me with fulfilment and a new purpose that has helped me to go on with my life.

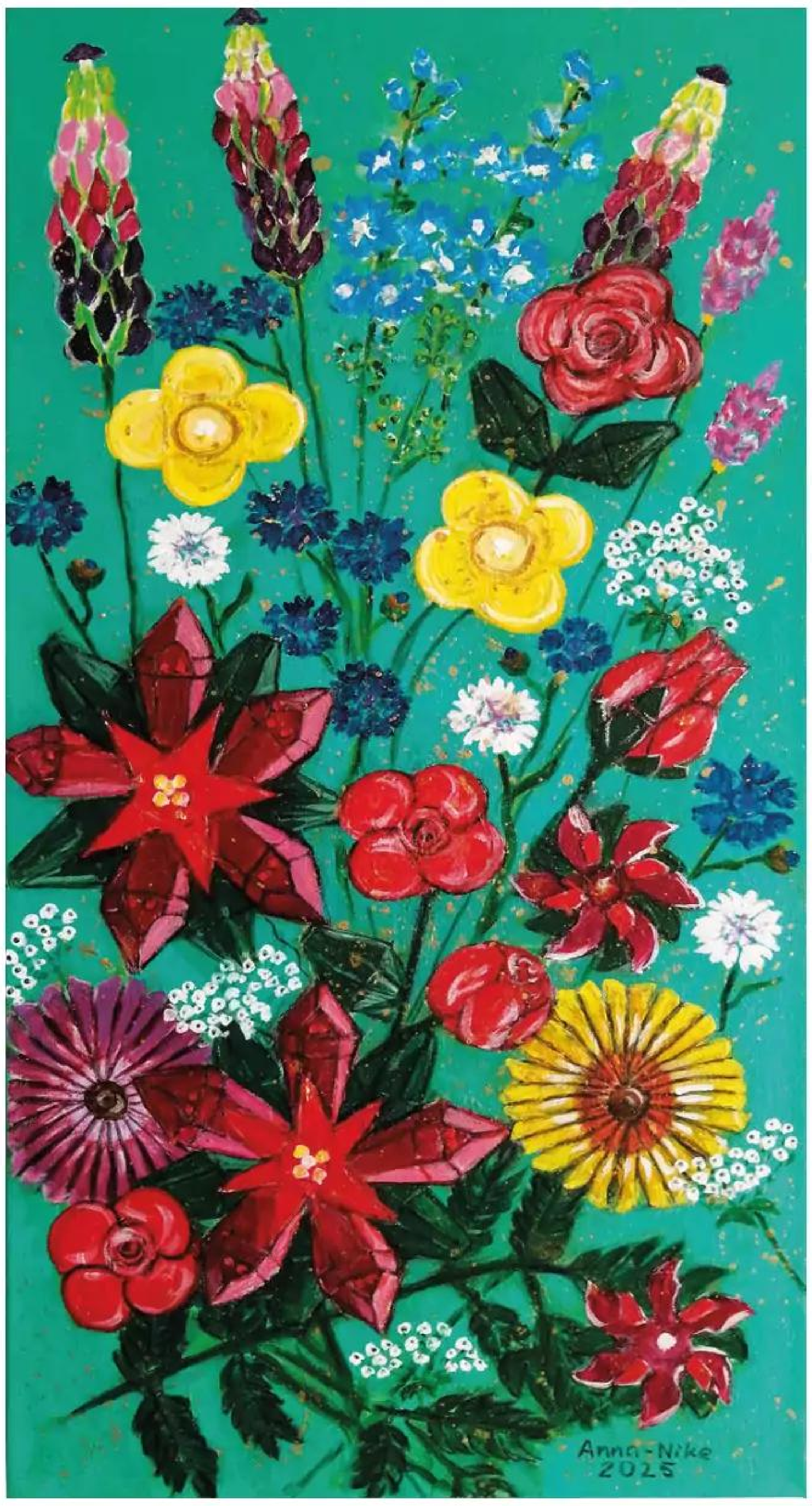
My latest LEGO box is waiting for me on the dining table. This time it's a typewriter, a musical instrument and flowers. They will connect me with my creativity again, giving me something to look forward to – the imaginative, colourful and smart world of possibilities and completed masterpieces of LEGO art.

Anna Nike Leskowsky is a retired elementary school teacher who lives in Toronto. Her articles, poetry and artwork have been published in magazines and papers including Canadian Teacher Magazine and Canadian Immigrant Magazine. Anna lives in Toronto.

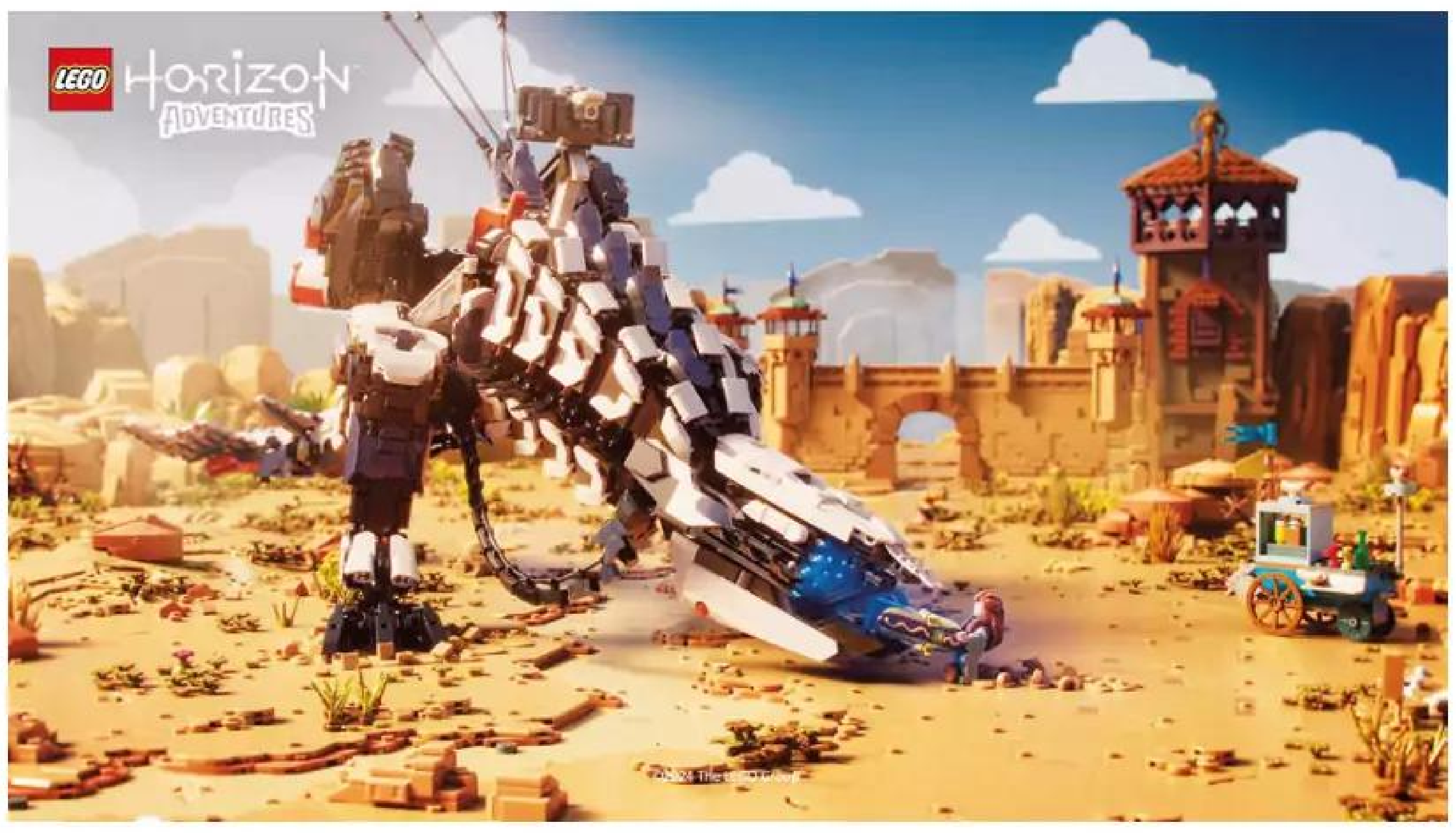
> "It felt as if my mind left my aching body and entered an imaginary rose garden."

Left: *Anna Nike Leskowsky was inspired to paint Conscious Garden, acrylic on canvas.*

Below: *Anna Nike Leskowsky building with LEGO bricks.*



Five things we've learned this month...



1

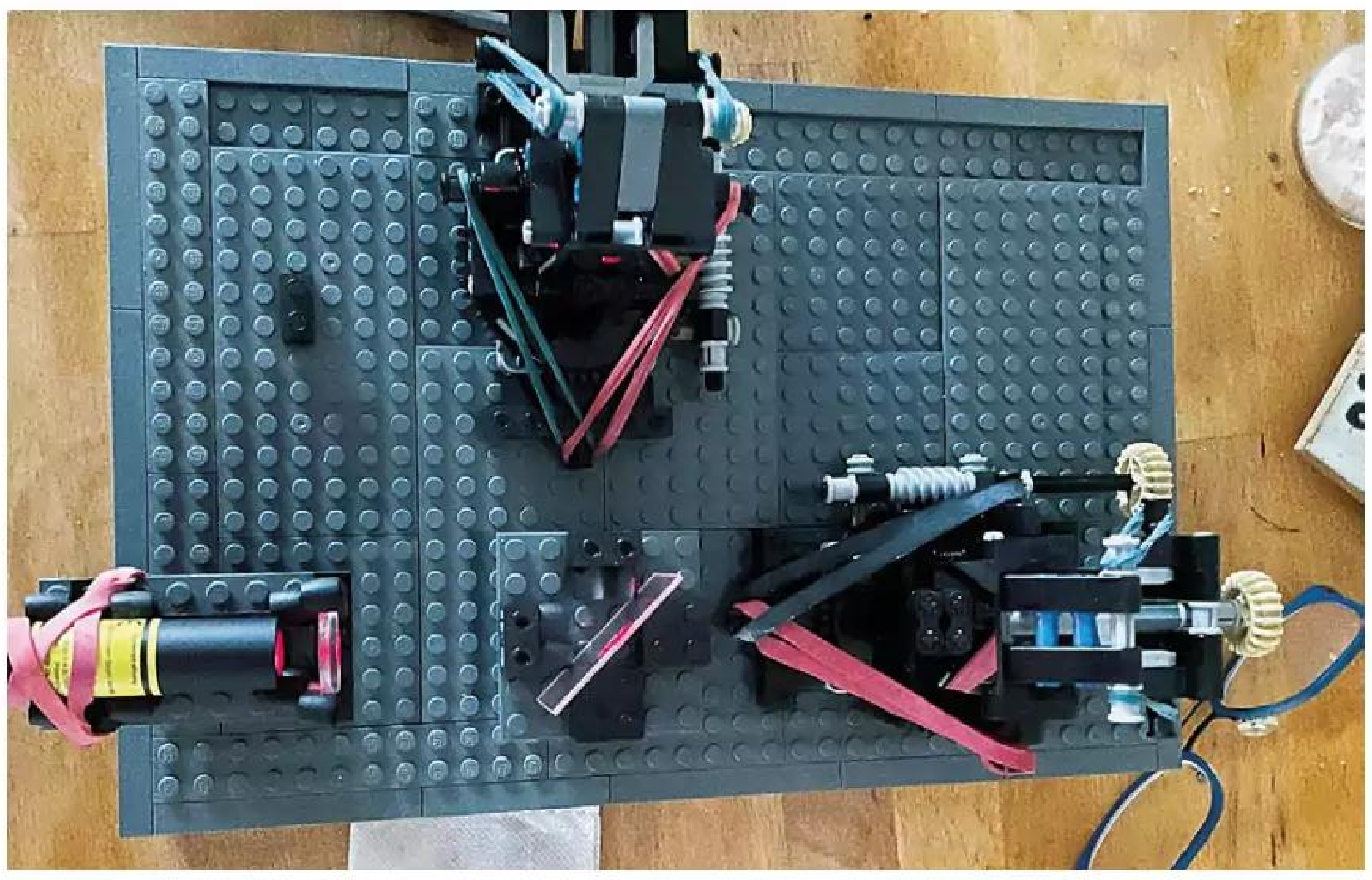
A LEGO GAME IS IN THE RUNNING FOR BAFTA AWARDS

LEGO Horizon Adventures, a brick-built spin-off of the popular Horizon video game franchise, has earned four nominations for 2025's BAFTA Games Awards. The title being up for Best Family Game and Best Animation should be no surprise, given the sleek animation style and the focus on family fun, plus its nomination for Best British Game is thanks to its developer, Studio Gobo. But being nominated for Best Multiplayer Game puts it in some strange company for a LEGO title, having to compete with the likes of Call of Duty and Helldivers. The industry acclaim will be appreciated for a game that didn't trouble the sales charts.

2

BUILDING COMES TO F1

As the 75th anniversary season of Formula One kicks off, so does the next stage of the racing giant's collaboration with the LEGO Group. A total of 20 pop-up LEGO Stores will be at different races over the course of the season, going everywhere from Las Vegas to Shanghai. Thirteen races will also have LEGO Fan Zones, with exclusive builds and other opportunities. "This exciting collaboration with the LEGO Group keeps going from strength to strength and allows us to take the world of Formula 1 beyond the racetrack and directly into homes," said Formula 1 Chief Commercial Officer Emily Prazer.



3

BRICKS CAN SPLIT LIGHT

LEGO bricks continue to be used for all sorts of incredible feats, including being part of a homemade interferometer made along with a Raspberry Pi, put together by Kyra Cole. An interferometer is pretty much as high-tech as it sounds — the setup splits light into two and then recombines it at the end, which allows for the measurement of distances and the detection of vibrations, all with excellent precision. Such tech is usually incredibly expensive, but Kyra's LEGO brick and Raspberry Pi-based design makes it much more affordable, increasing the accessibility of the technology.

4

TYRES ARE NOW SUSTAINABLE

What do old fishing nets and recycled engine oil have in common? They're both the key elements in new tyre pieces produced by the LEGO Group. The nets and oil allow the LEGO Group to reduce reliance on virgin fossil fuel-based ingredients and make tyre pieces from at least 30% recycled material. They are in some sets already and are expected to be in more than 100 sets by the end of 2025. "The tyres are just one of many options we're working on to make our products more sustainable and it's encouraging us to see something this innovative making it into our sets," said LEGO Chief Sustainability Officer Annette Stube.

5

LEGOLAND WILL HOST A FESTIVAL

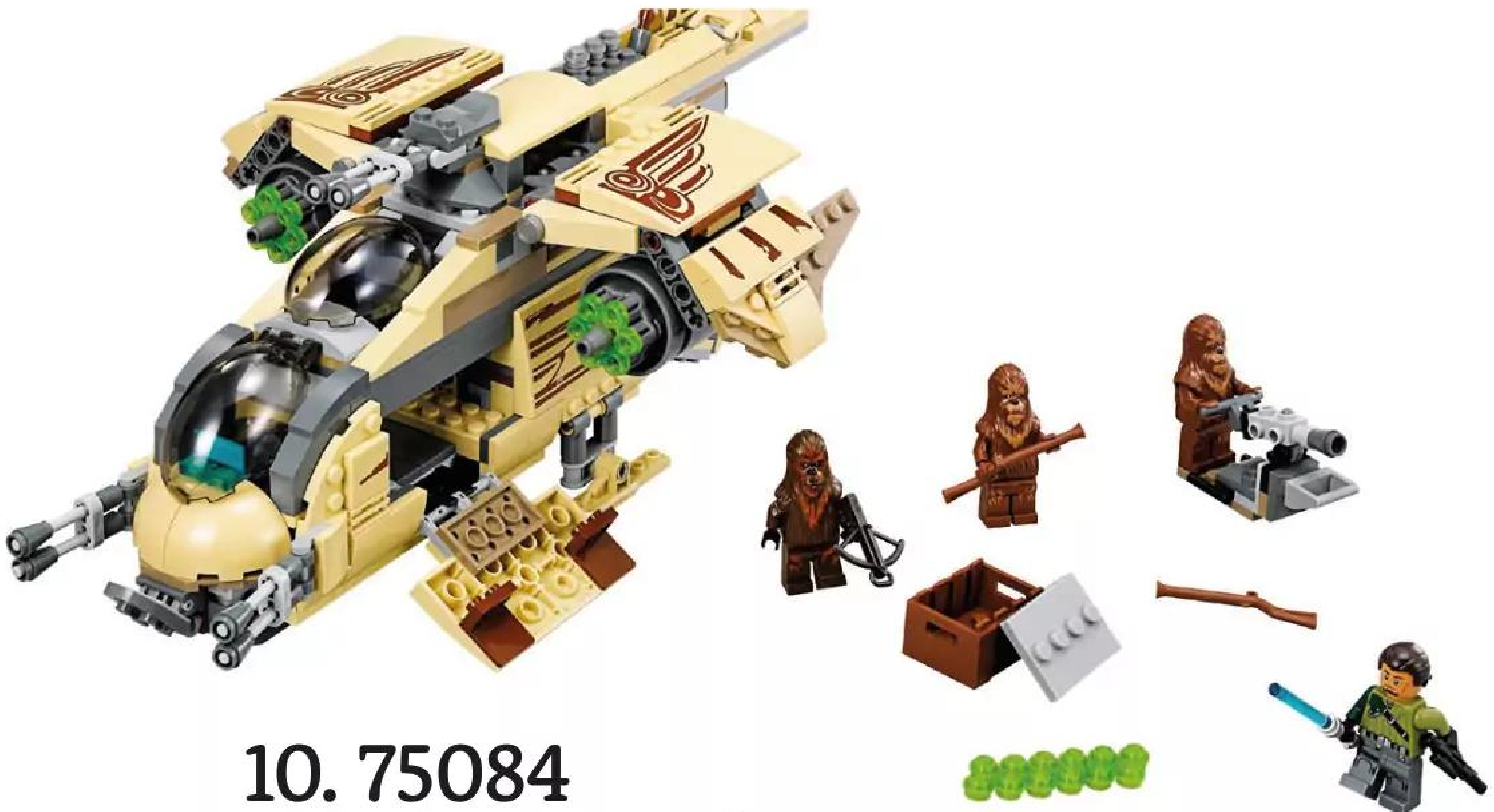
To lead up to World Play Day on June 11, seven LEGOLAND Resorts will be hosting LEGO Festival, a six-weekend long event beginning on May 3 and running all the way to the big day. "LEGOLAND Resorts have always been a 'child first' experience of a theme park," said Merlin Entertainments CEO Fiona Eastwood. "Who better to deliver their first festival experience?" Children who attend LEGO Festival and participate in its five interactive play zones will complete the festival's Play Pact, which promises to provide underserved children and their families with an opportunity to play at a LEGOLAND park.

RYAN EVERLETH

Top 10

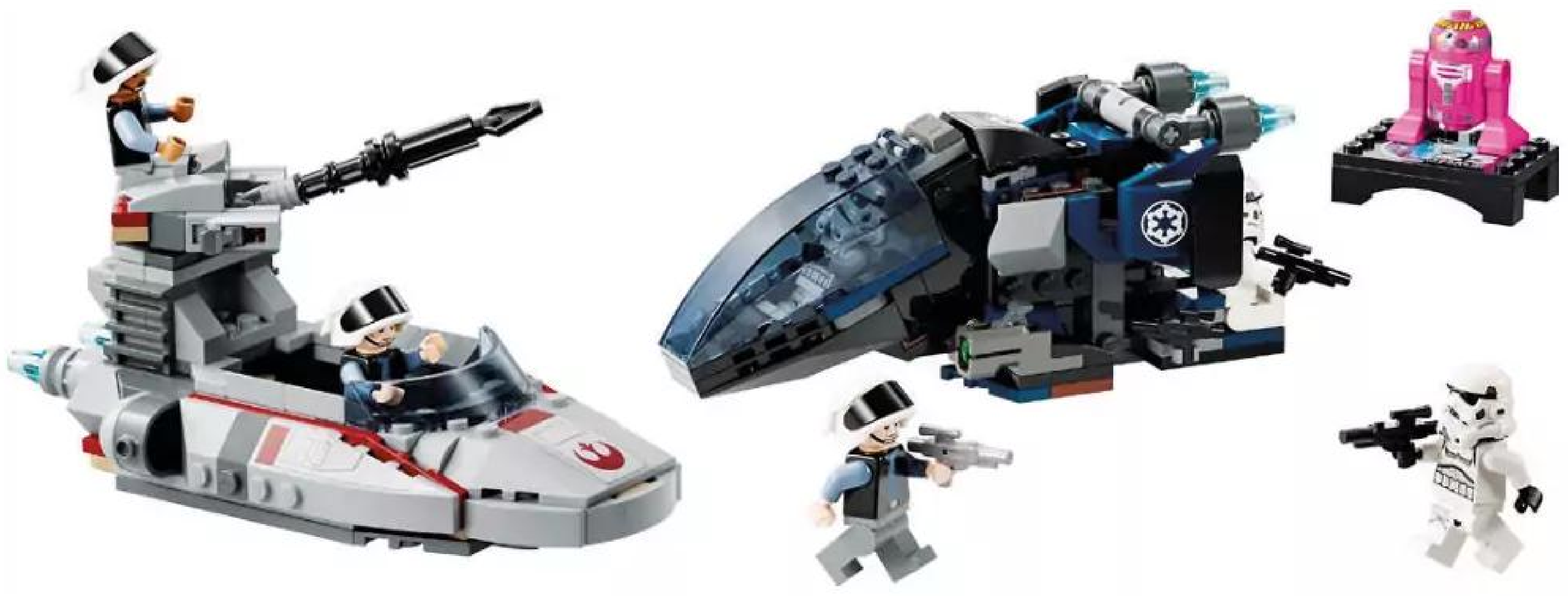
Troop transports

Blocks counts down the best LEGO models designed to carry an army of minifigures into battle



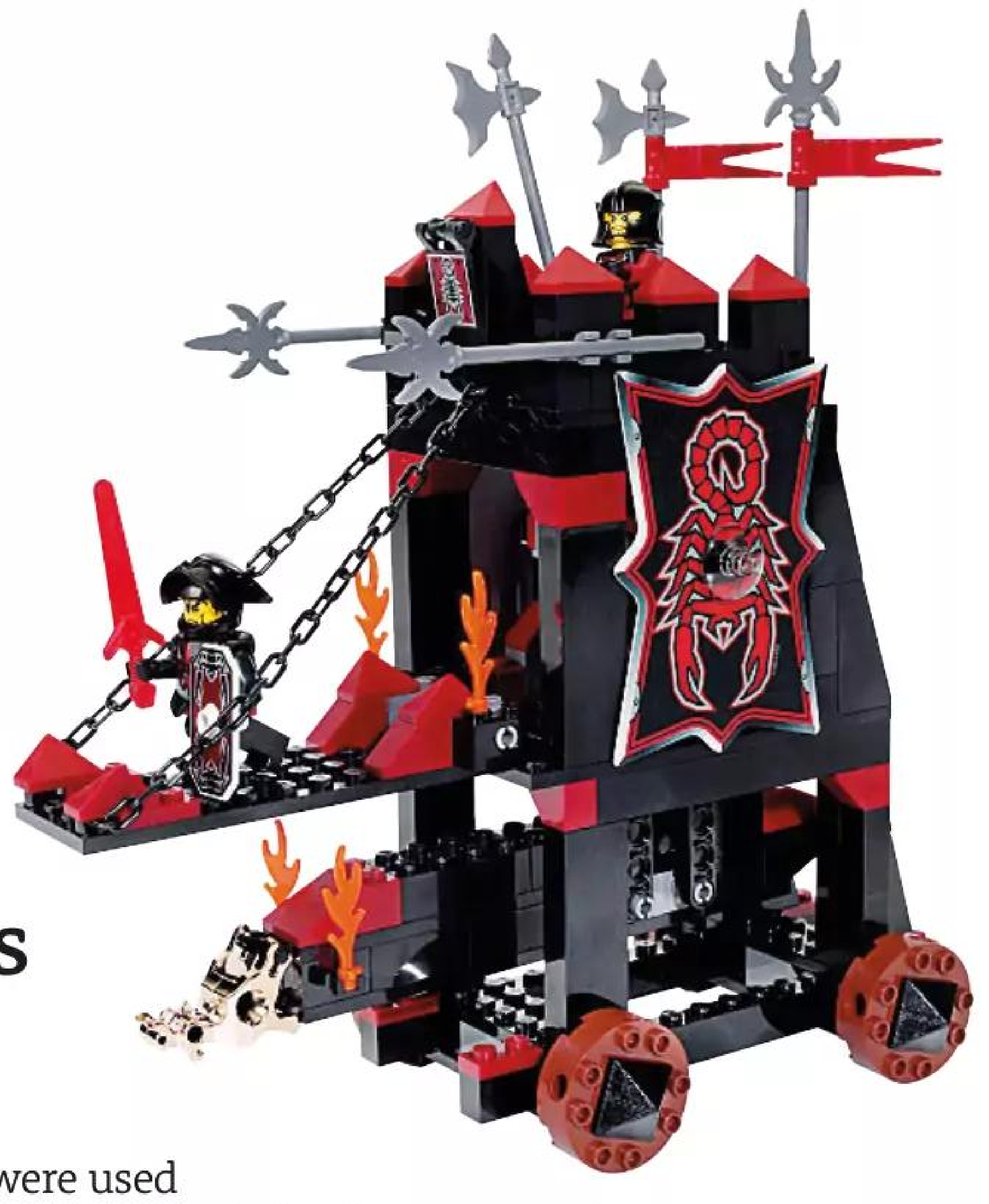
10. 75084
Wookie Gunship

The Wookie Gunship made its first television appearance in Star Wars Rebels; naturally, a LEGO model followed. This ship is neatly styled – the tan pieces give the impression of a wooden aesthetic, even though the ship is made of metal – and it was the first ship to have rapid shooters. Unfortunately, it lacks somewhat in the troop-transporting element – Wookies are large beings and there's not much space in the centre of the ship. Still, three Wookies are included in the set, as is a deployable turret. This LEGO ship gives the impression of being incredibly sturdy, just like the Wookies themselves.



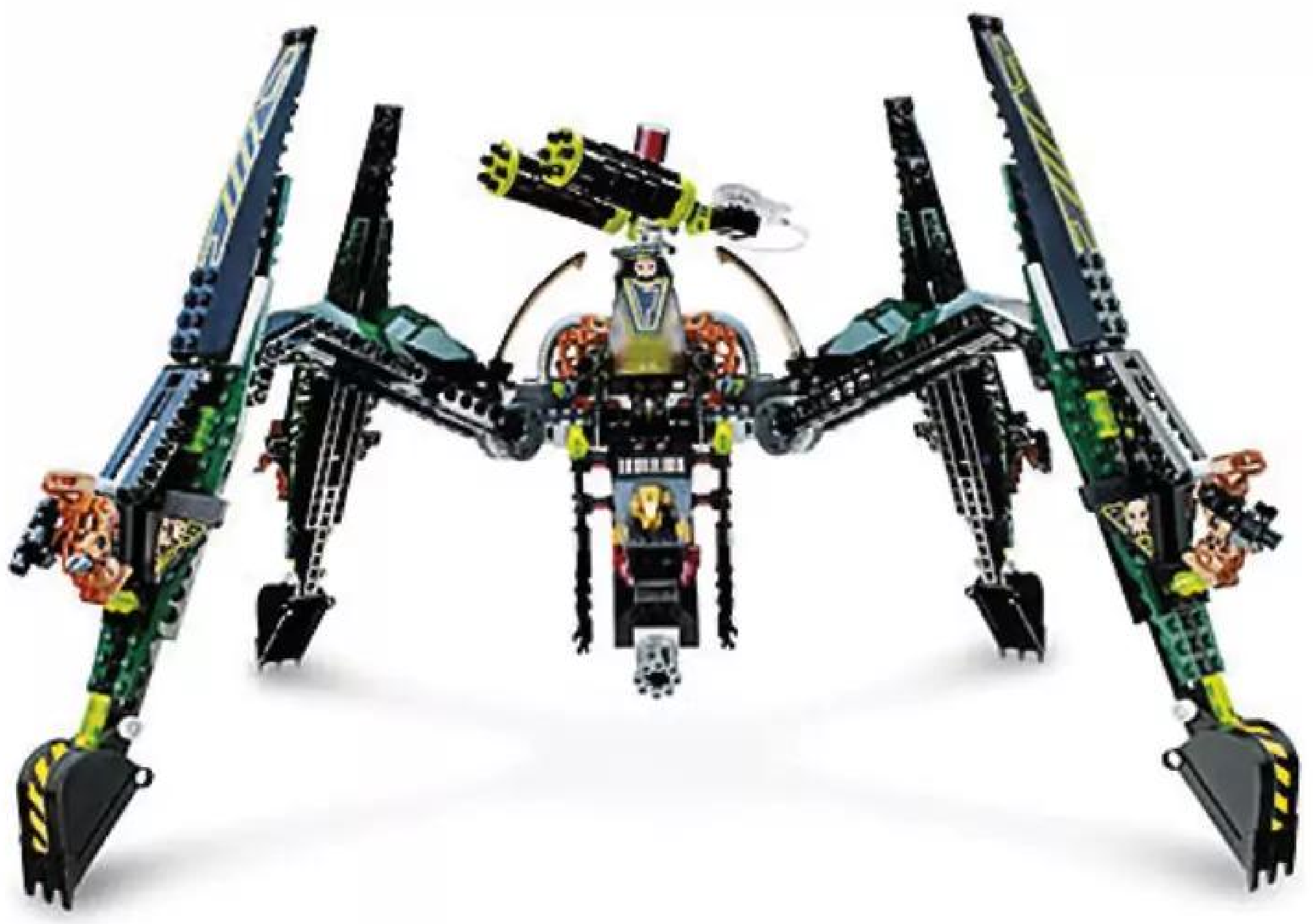
9. 40755 Imperial Dropship vs Rebel Scout Speeder

What's better than one LEGO troop transporter? Two in one set, of course. 40755 Imperial Dropship vs Rebel Scout Speeder took the anniversary of the theme as an occasion to revisit two key Star Wars battle packs, 7667 Imperial Dropship and 7668 Rebel Scouter Speeder. This 2024 set has all that you need to stage dramatic battles between the Empire and Rebel Alliance, with three troops for each faction. They all fit rather snugly on each build as there is not much space. Both vehicles benefit from modern design techniques, with the speeder looking particularly robust, whilst the dropship is quite amusing with the Stormtroopers sitting at the back.



8. 8800
Vladek's Siege Engine

Siege towers were used throughout the medieval period – they protected troops as they approached a fortification's walls and would then drop a gangplank to allow the troops to attack. There have been a few LEGO siege towers across the Castle-focused themes, but there's something particularly menacing about 2004's 8800 Vladek's Siege Engine from Knights' Kingdom II that means its pips all the other versions. The various spears, black and dark red colour scheme and dragon-headed battering ram all contribute to the set's complete look, which is finished by the Scorpion banners on either side. This is the last thing you'd want to see rolling up to your castle walls.



7. 7707
Striking Venom

In the world of Exo-Force, the robot antagonists unleash wave after wave of Devastators and Iron Drones against the human inhabitants of Sentai Fortress. Key to this is the Striking Venom, an intimidating, spider-like vehicle that carries Meca One, the robot leader, and six of his drones into battle; four of the drones are connected to the Striking Venom's legs and can be deployed during the heat of battle. This impressive vehicle is armed to the teeth, decorated with gatling guns all over. Whilst many of the ships on this list fly into battle, this one is designed to burrow through the earth with its shovel claws.

6. 7662 Trade Federation MTT

During the opening sequence of Star Wars: The Phantom Menace, viewers get a taste of the droid army that is about to invade Naboo; as part of the climactic battle, this force is unleashed against the Gungan army. Key to this is the MTT (Multi-Troop Transport), from which row upon row of Battle Droids emerge. 7662 Trade Federation MTT was the second LEGO iteration of this vehicle and had much more accurate shaping than its predecessor. The legion of 20 Battle Droids it includes is especially impressive. 7662 is suitably bulky, especially when compared to its successor (2014's 75058 MTT) and remains one of the best troop-based sets. Roger, roger.

LEGO
STAR WARS
9-14
7662
Trade Federation MTT

5. 8098 Clone Turbo Tank

The Clone Turbo Tank functioned as both a troop carrier and as a tank, designed to operate on all terrains. The first LEGO model of this behemoth released in 2005, however it is the 2010 version that makes this list for its robustness (the previous model was a bit flimsy) and scale (its 2016 successor was notably smaller). The tank is mightily stocked with various guns and cannons, while inside there's plenty of storage space for some weary troops. The build does a superb job of the vehicle's suspension system, giving the set an overall impressive sense of movement, power and speed.

4. 31132 Viking Ship and the Midgard Serpent

Viking longships are famous for their narrow shape; they were used for raids and sea travel. A few LEGO Viking longboats have been released over the years and 2022's Viking Ship and the Midgard Serpent sails onto this list for its robustness and surprising grandeur. The brick-built dragon figurehead marks the early stages of a fun build that results in a ship that's almost 45cm long. The deck is sizeable, with space for a dining table (how civilised) and a fun ballista, while the shields on the ship's hull add some colour. The Midgard serpent better beware – these Vikings aren't messing around.

3. 10195 Republic Dropship with AT-OT

10195 Republic Dropship with AT-OT was designed to carry Clone Troopers into the heat of battle; this model includes eight troopers and there's space on the deck for all of them and many more from your collection. However, 10195 provides a second way to transport the troopers through the additional Republic Dropship, which can swoop in, connect to the AT-OT and fly off. The connecting mechanism is simple but works seamlessly and is even compatible with 7676 Republic Attack Gunship. This short-lived set is on many a LEGO fan's wish-list and rightly so.

2. 75021 Republic Gunship

The Republic Gunship, or Low Altitude Assault Transport (LAAT), has been a fan-favourite Star Wars ship since its introduction in Attack of the Clones. Inspired by the Russian Mil Mi-24 HIND Helicopter gunship, the Republic Gunship is known for its robust design and impressive firepower. Various LEGO Republic Gunships have been offered since the ship's film debut, but 75021 Republic Gunship from 2013 stands out for its accurate colouring and sense of scale (75309 Republic Gunship is exemplary, but too big for minifigure play). The model is surprising sleek and captures the ship's shape accurately – it's definitely one to swoosh around once the troops are loaded up.

1. 70815 Super Secret Police Dropship

The Super Secret Police are part of President Business' plan to catch the Master Builders in The LEGO Movie and their dropships are essential to the attack on Cloud Cuckoo Land. What's immediately apparent is the model's sense of scale – the large cockpit piece shows off the two-tier design, giving the set some height and there are plenty of fun features like the rappel line and the prison cell. Plus, the set includes eight superb minifigures – four good guys (including Johnny Thunder) and then four Robo SWAT figures, which fit into the ship's central space. There's no need to play bad cop here – everything is awesome.

ANTHONY WALKER-COOK

SUPER SECRET POLICE
10TH DV
409

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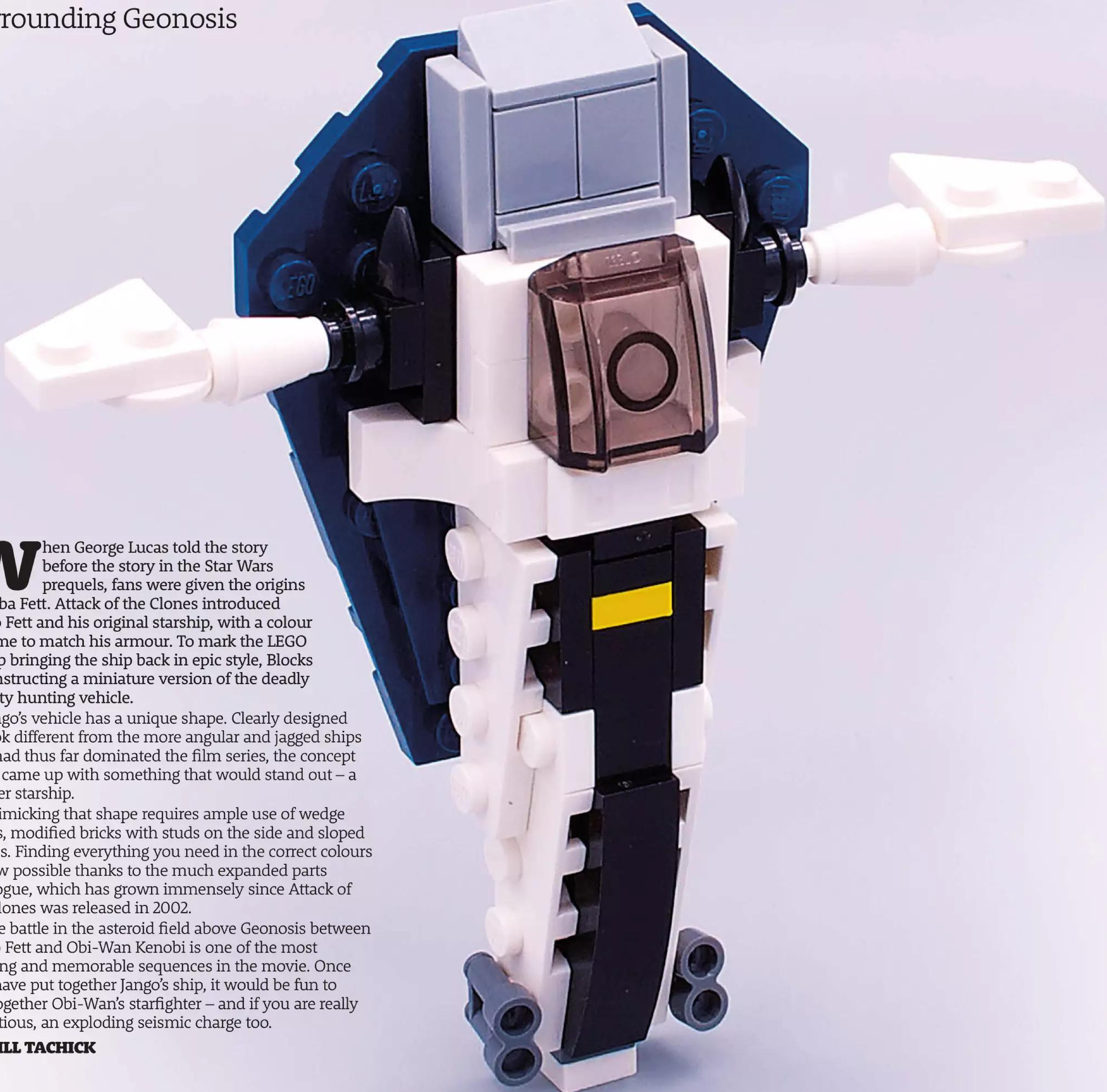
Jango Fett's Starship

Power up the seismic charges! It's time to take out a troublesome Jedi amidst the asteroids surrounding Geonosis



When George Lucas told the story before the story in the Star Wars prequels, fans were given the origins of Boba Fett. Attack of the Clones introduced Jango Fett and his original starship, with a colour scheme to match his armour. To mark the LEGO Group bringing the ship back in epic style, Blocks is constructing a miniature version of the deadly bounty hunting vehicle.

Jango's vehicle has a unique shape. Clearly designed to look different from the more angular and jagged ships that had thus far dominated the film series, the concept team came up with something that would stand out – a curvier starship.

Mimicking that shape requires ample use of wedge plates, modified bricks with studs on the side and sloped curves. Finding everything you need in the correct colours is now possible thanks to the much expanded parts catalogue, which has grown immensely since Attack of the Clones was released in 2002.

The battle in the asteroid field above Geonosis between Jango Fett and Obi-Wan Kenobi is one of the most exciting and memorable sequences in the movie. Once you have put together Jango's ship, it would be fun to put together Obi-Wan's starfighter – and if you are really ambitious, an exploding seismic charge too.

WILL TACHICK

Get the parts list: blocksmag.com/goto/jango-ship

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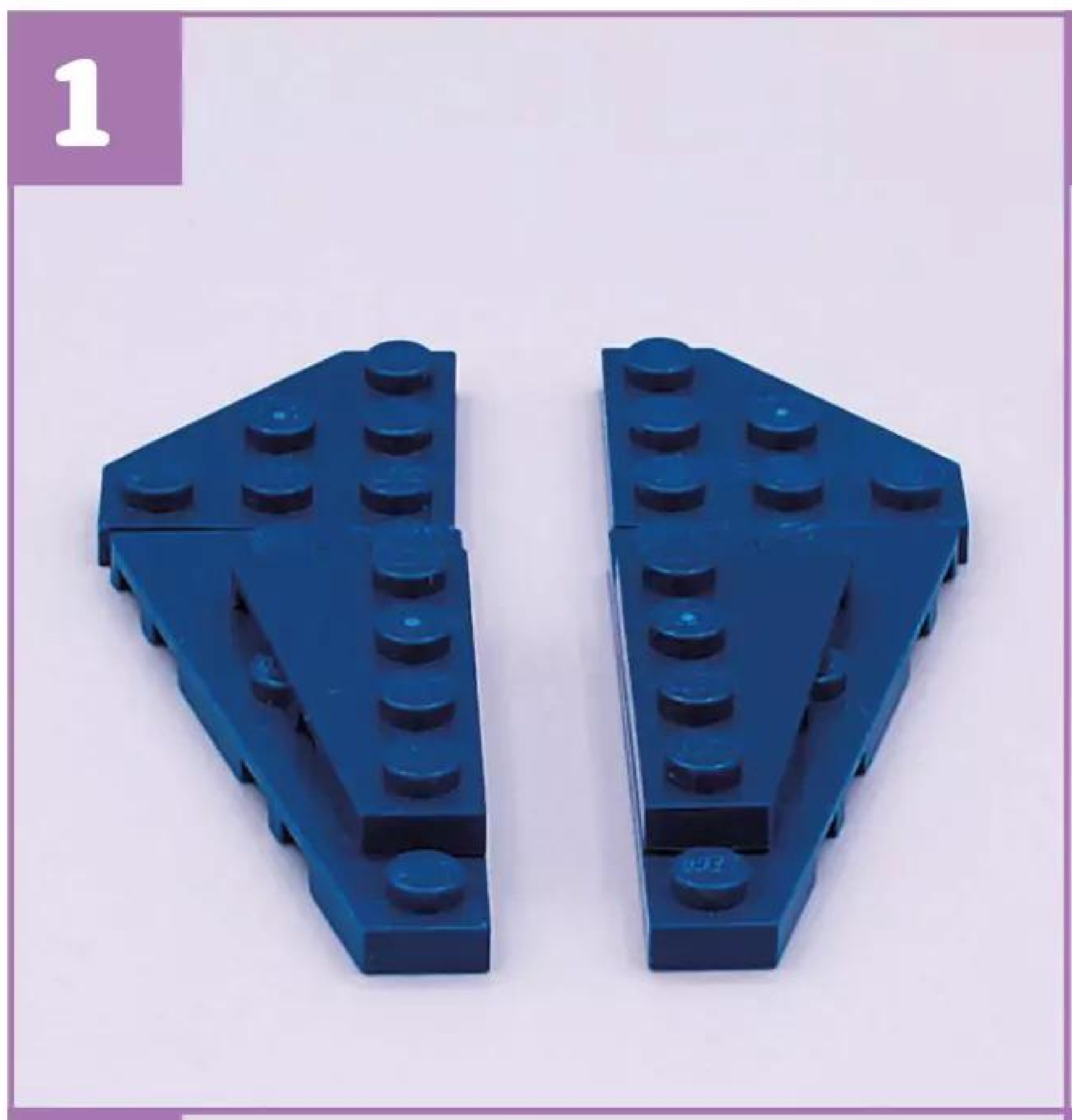

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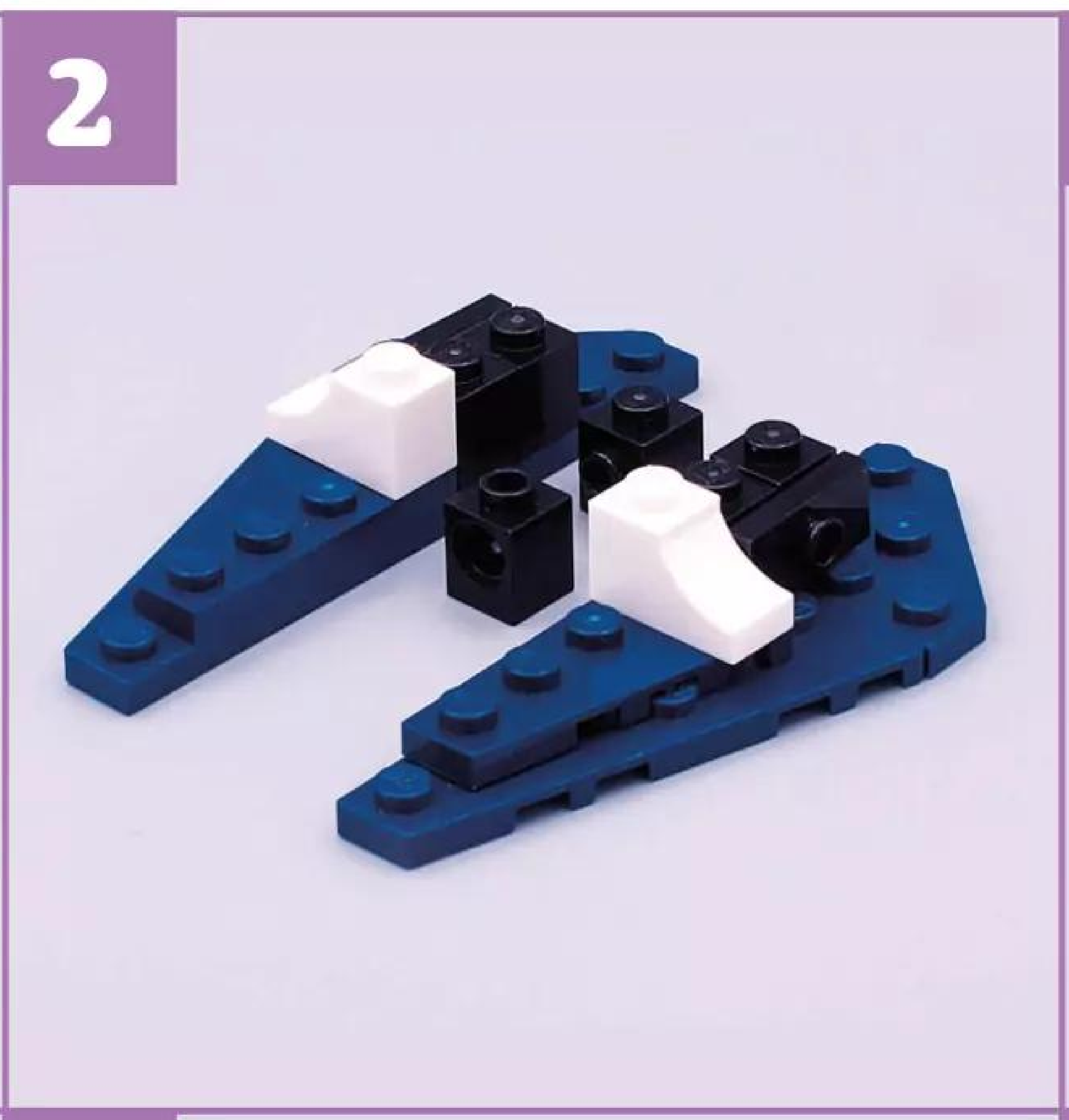

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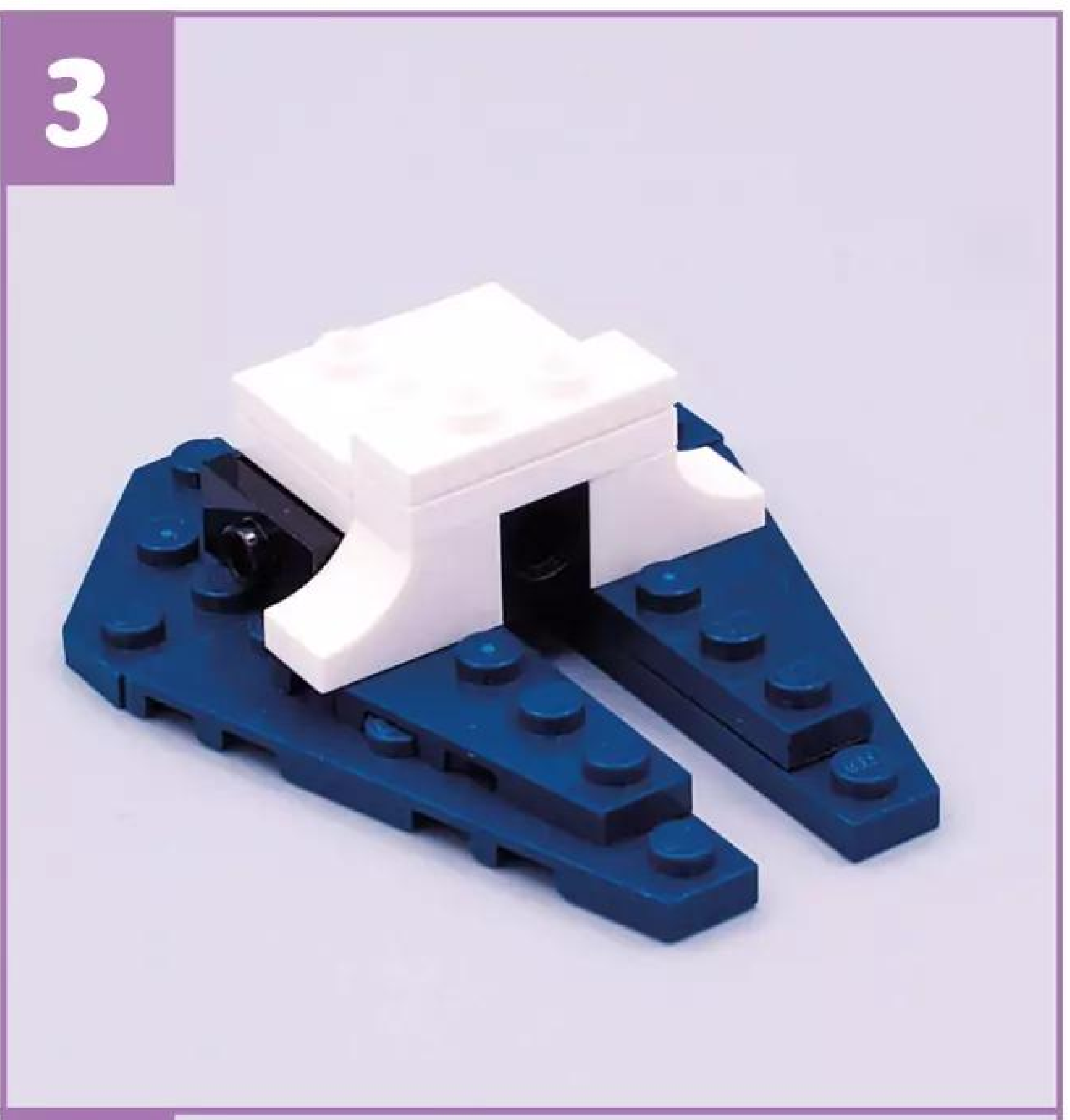

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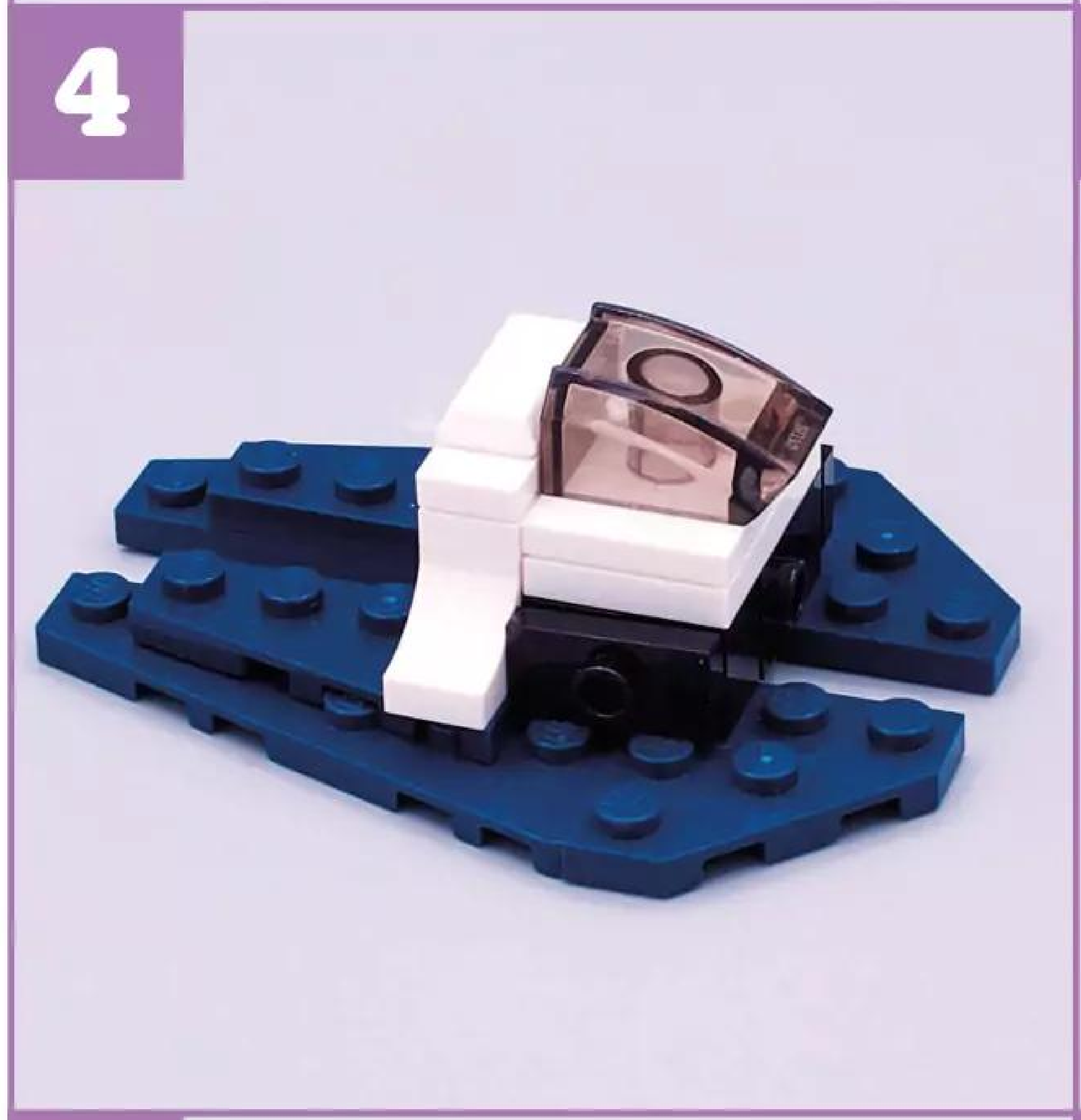

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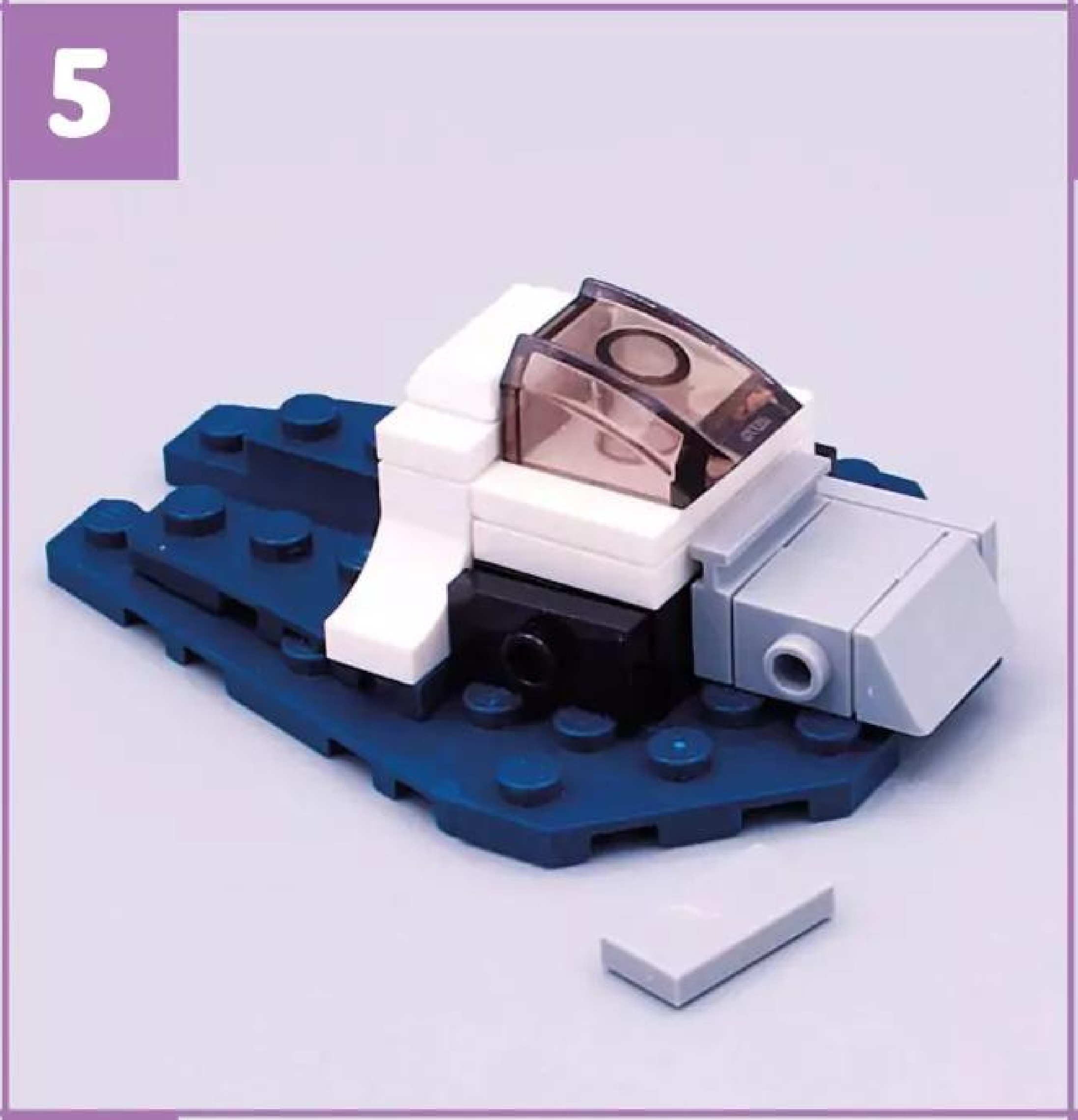

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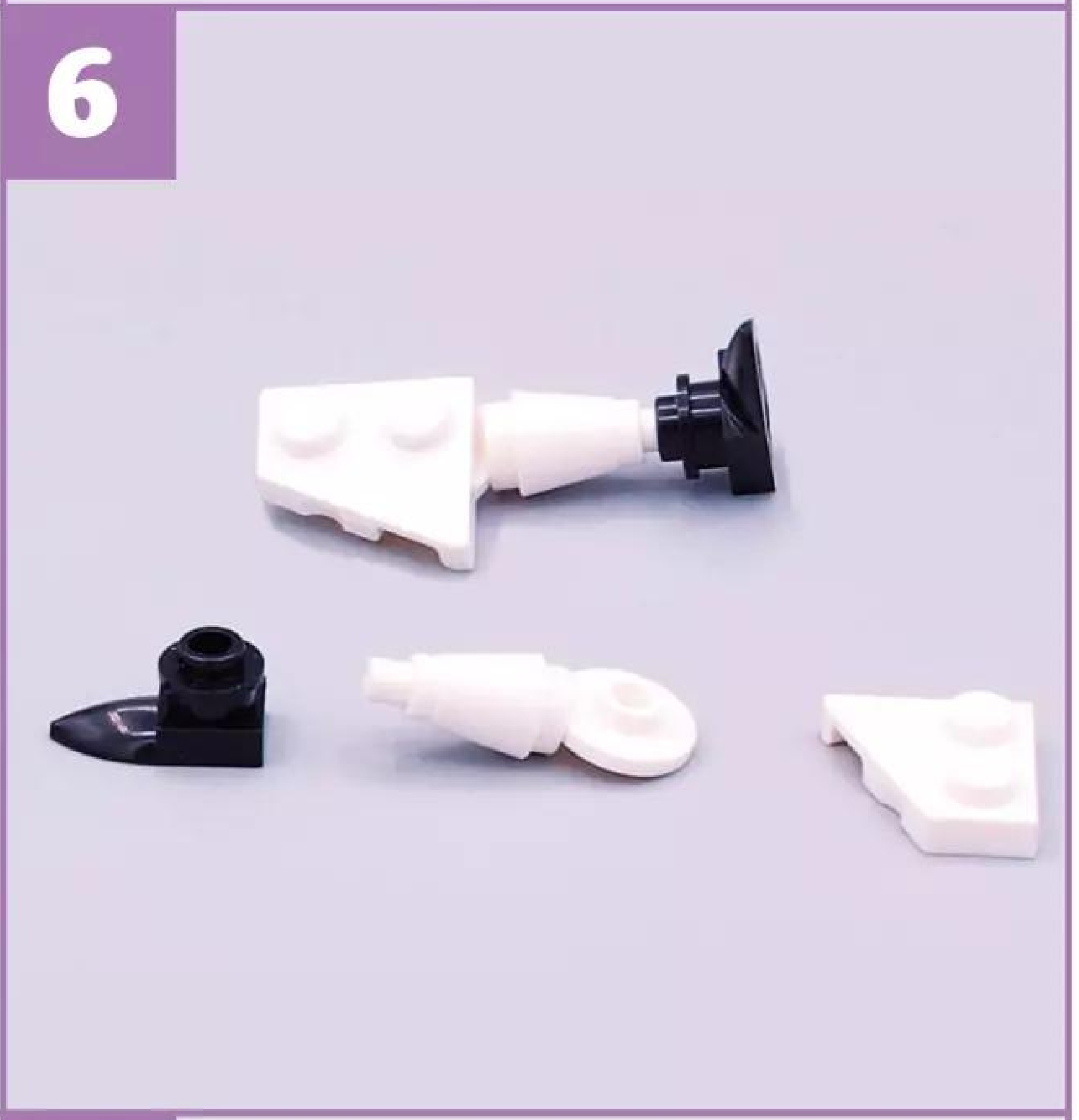

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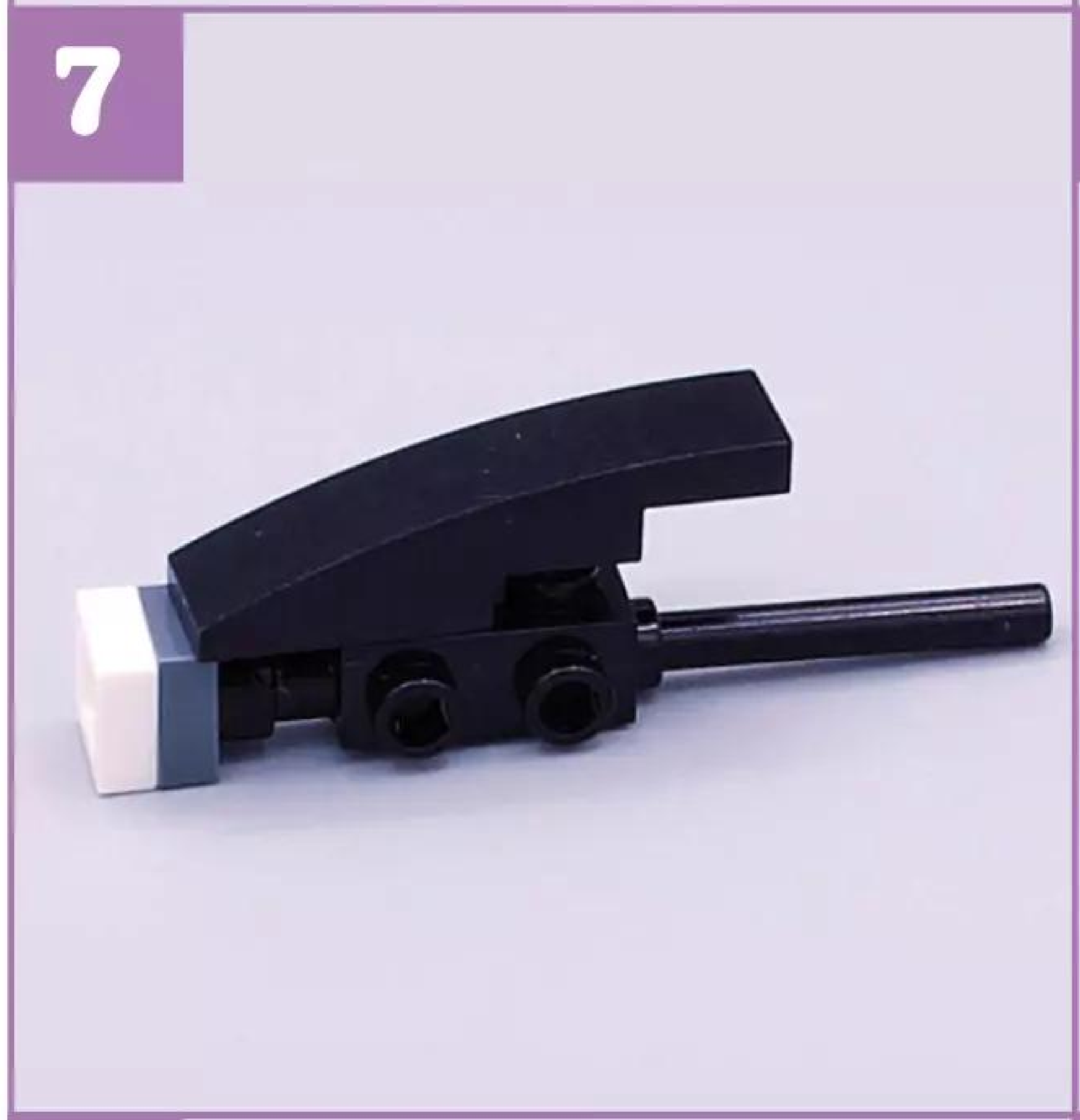

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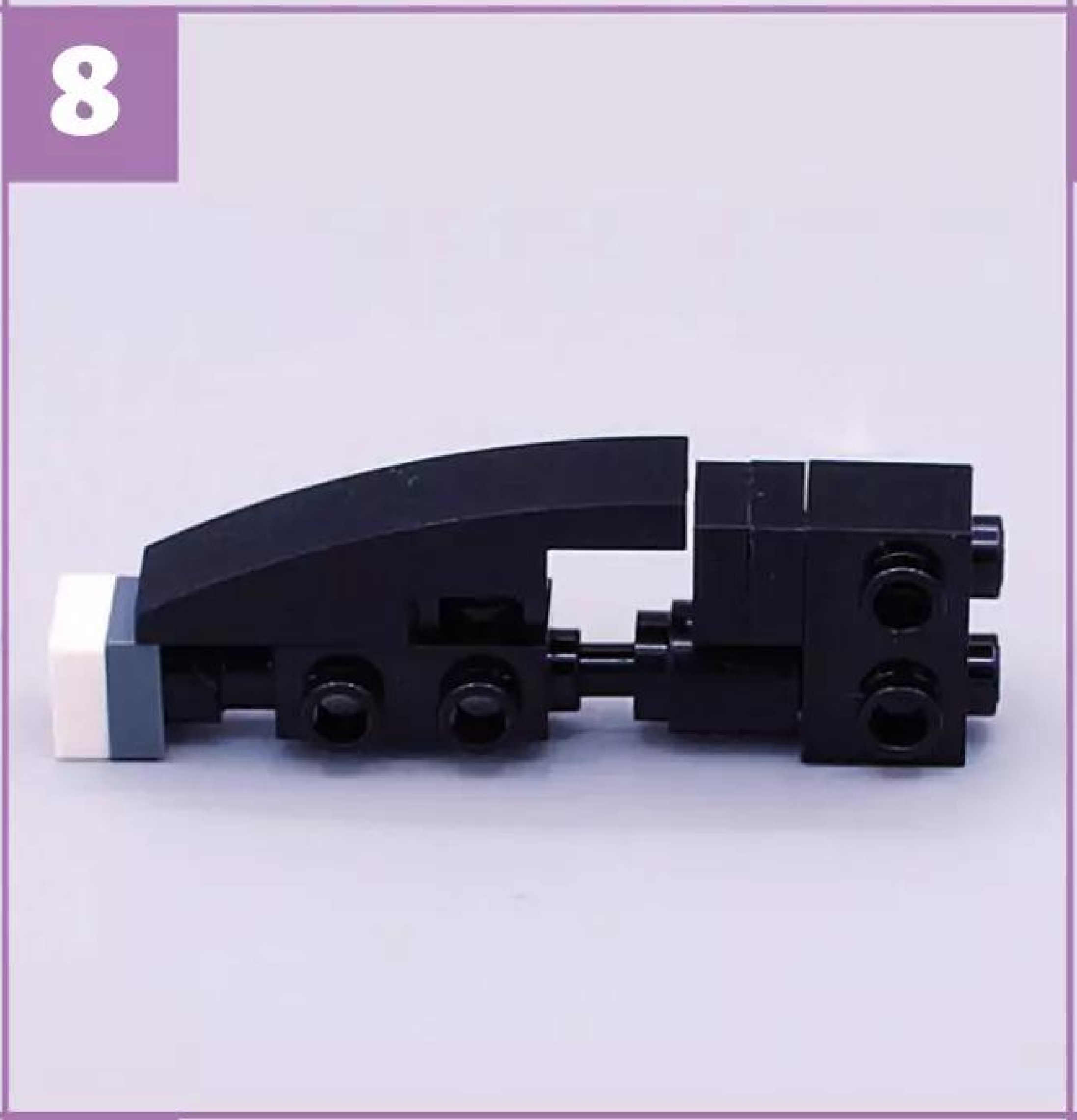

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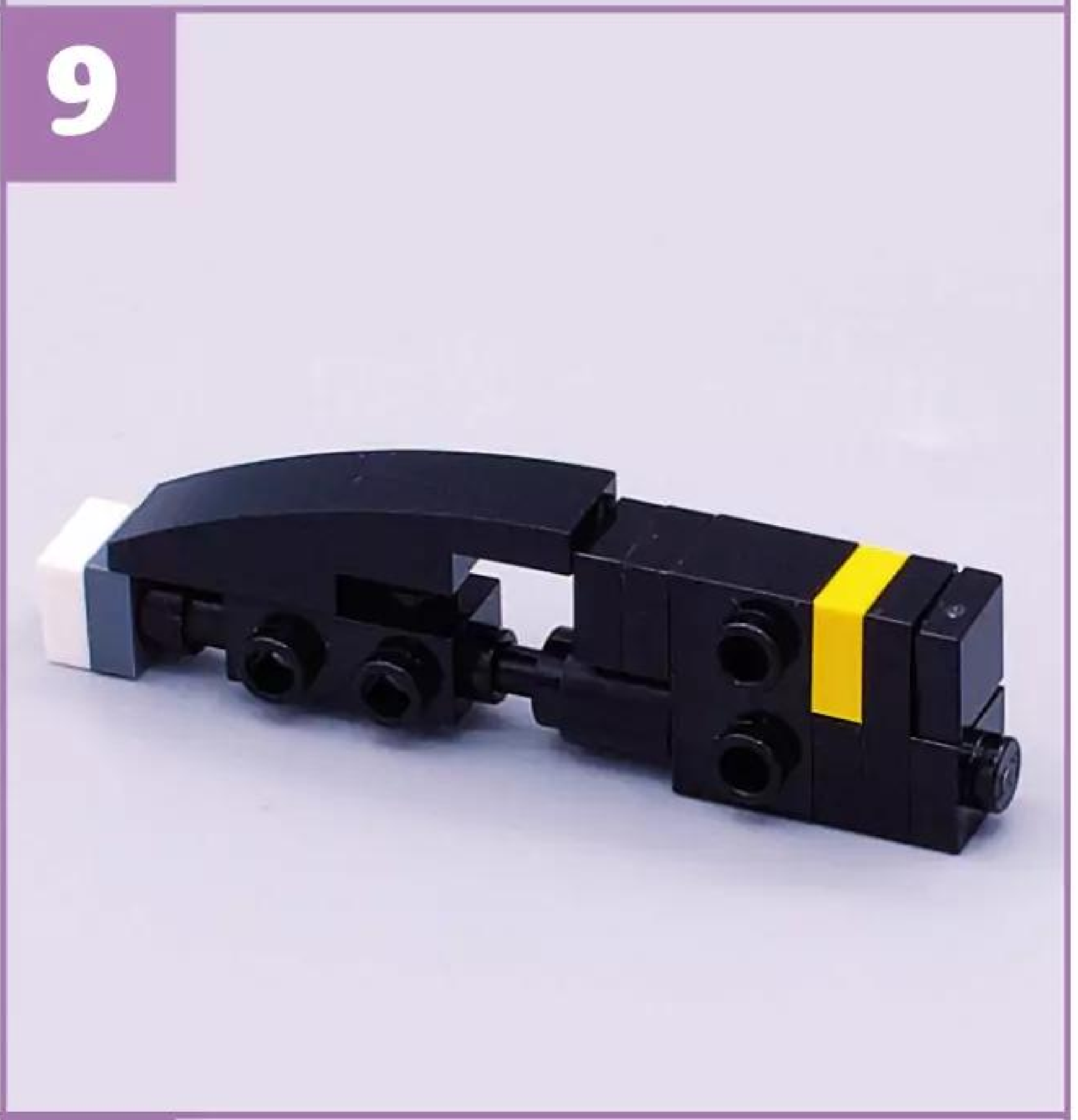

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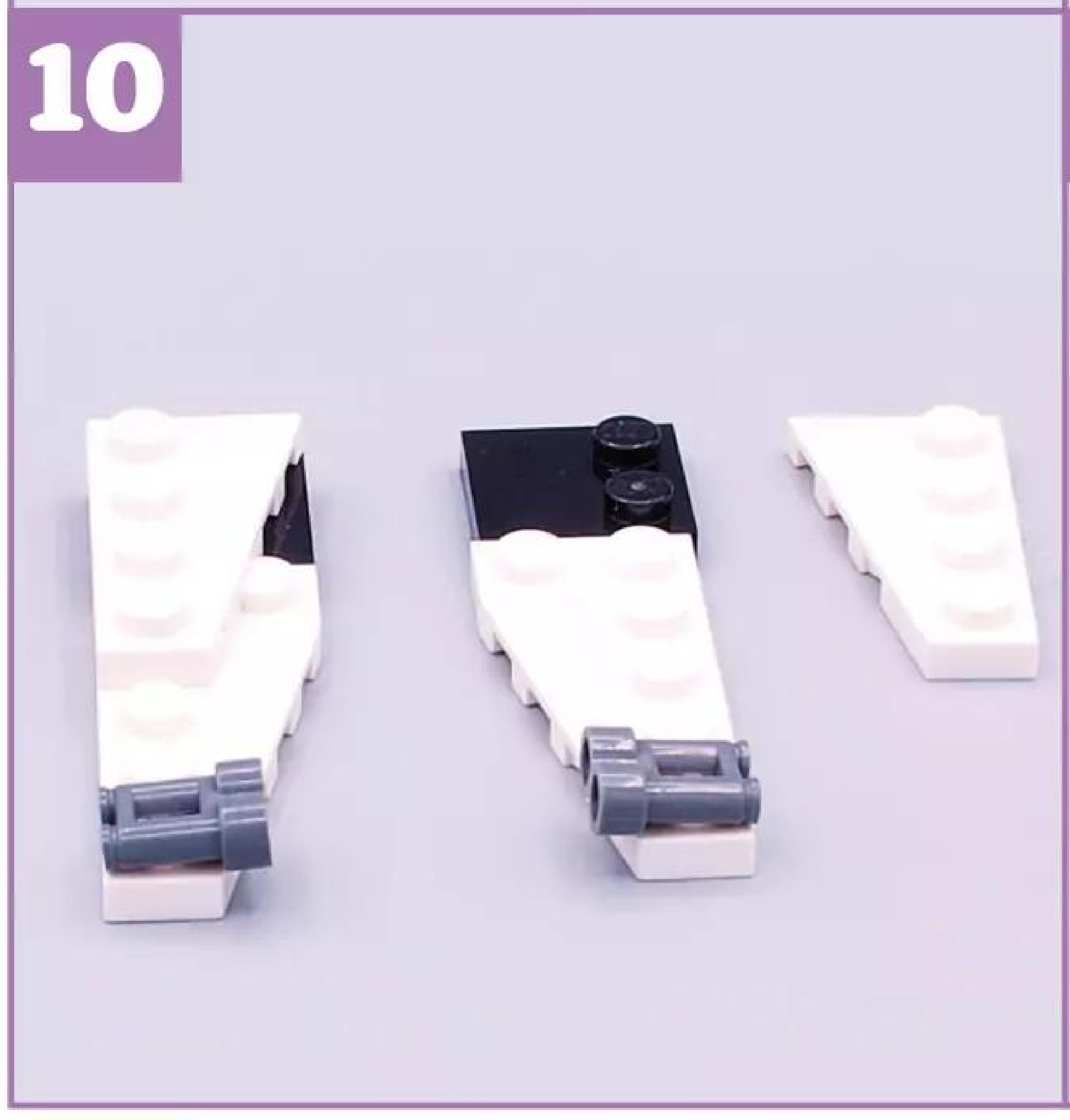

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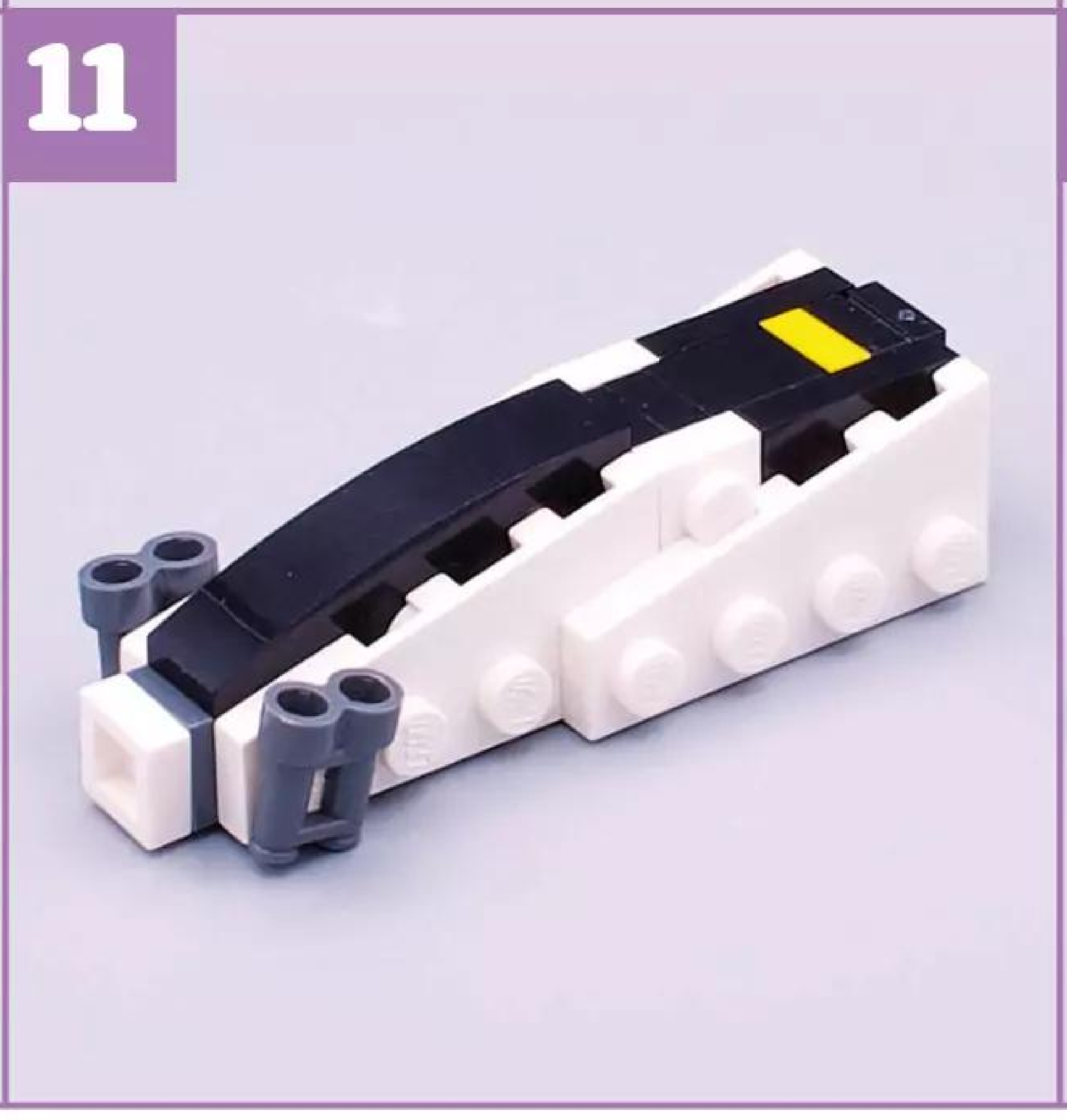

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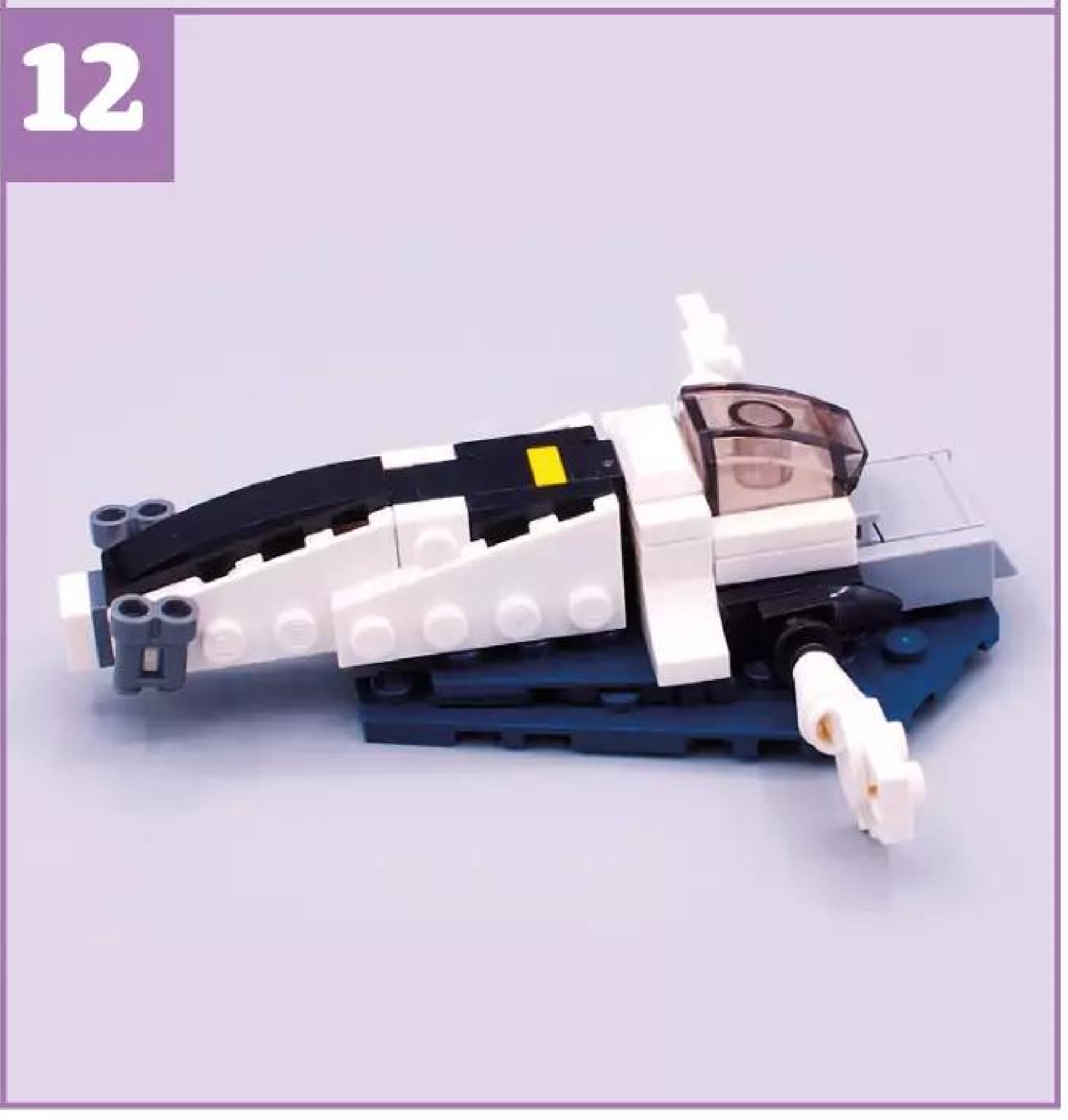

REBUILD, REVIVE, REUSE

GIVING BRICKS NEW LIFE

The Toy Project is demonstrating that toys belong in the hands of children, not in landfill, as part of the charity's mission to provide access to play to all

Words: *Anthony Walker-Cook*

WWW.THETOYPROJECT.CO.UK
playmobil ACTION
FIRE STATION

Below: *On the day Blocks visits, balloons add to the fun.*

Right: *The Toy Project has a toy shop on Junction Road in Islington, London.*

Welcome to...
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LM66 JVO

Plasma Ball
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LILLY
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HUNTER

There's no way that a LEGO fan would be able to walk past one of the most colourful shops in London without stopping for a peek in the window – and then almost certainly a look inside. The Toy Project is filled to the brim with classic toys looking for a new home, including a range of carefully reconstructed LEGO sets alongside minifigures and loose bricks.

Although advertising and social media culture seek to convince everyone that they need more stuff, there are many who are struggling just to make ends meet financially, never mind contending with the supposed importance of buying the newest, shiniest products.

The number of children living in poverty in the UK is increasing – and the number of children not defined as living in poverty, but who have been impacted by a decade of stagnation and more recently by dramatic increases in the cost of living, is also increasing. Research shows that children from low income backgrounds face significant challenges, as social mobility has declined to its worst level in 50 years.

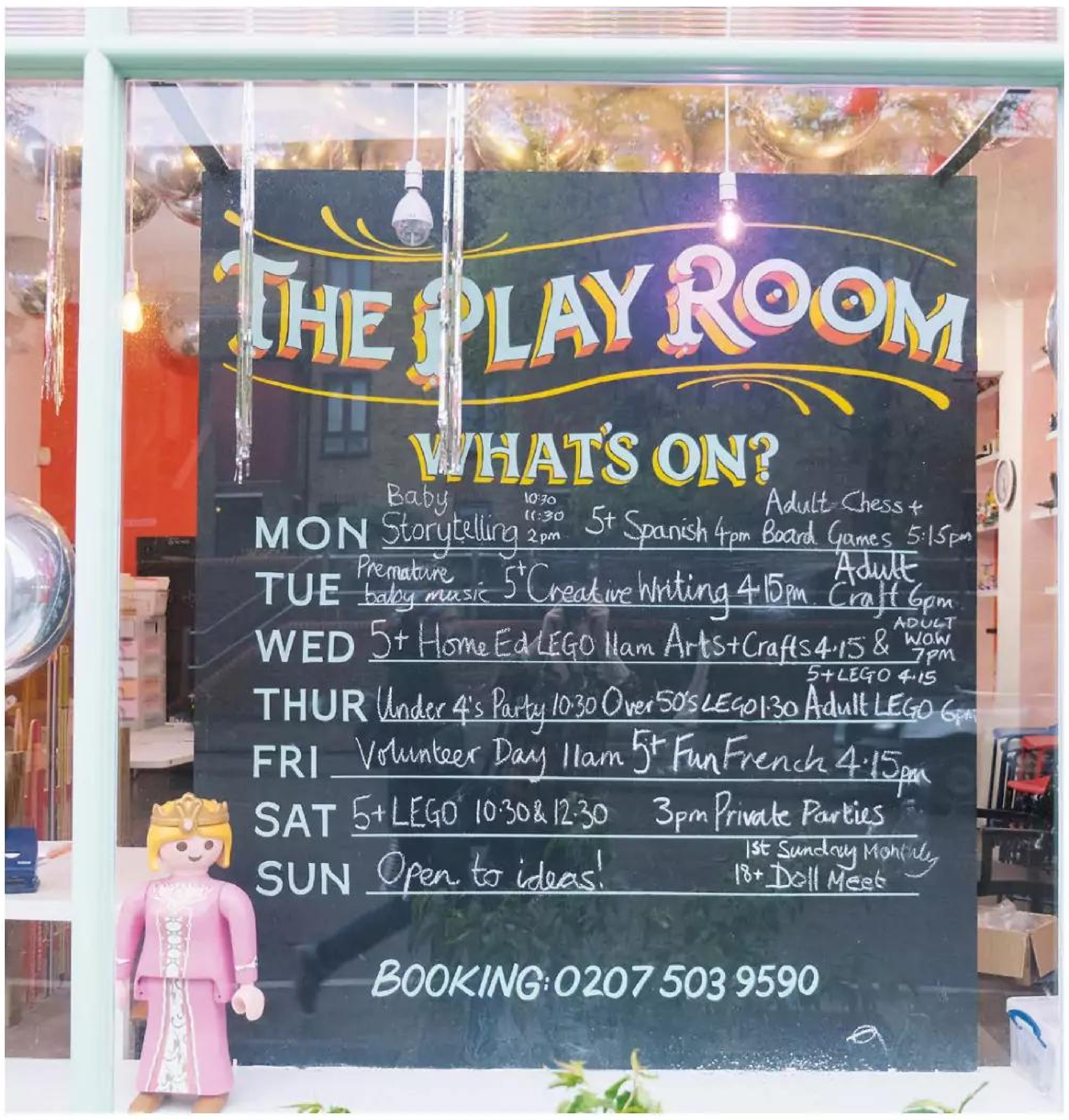
A big part of the immediate way that growing inequality impacts children is in their access to play – whether it be break times during the school day, having access to nearby playgrounds that are fit for use or being able to play with a variety of toys.

Toy appeals (where the public are asked to donate toys to children who need them) are common at Christmas and are organised by many high profile charities. But children need play throughout the year – in the UK alone it's estimated that around 30% of children are living in poverty.

THE SPACES

Such staggering numbers can be overwhelming. Where do you begin to address these issues? For Jane Garfield, the answer was in her own community. On Junction Road in Archway, in the London borough of Islington, there are three teal-coloured shop fronts that belong to the Toy Project, which aims to not only give toys to children from disadvantaged backgrounds but to also educate the public about reusing more widely.

These three store fronts are the beating heart of the Toy Project. One is a shop that's filled to the brim with toy donations that are both sold to the public (to raise funds for the charity's other initiatives) and given away to families and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organisations in need; there's a wide range of books, action figures, dolls and playsets lining the walls, with a reading room at the back that also functions as a film screening space.

Walking past the shop window, there's also an attractive display of LEGO sets and minifigures that are also for sale; given the charity relies on donations, you never what you'll find in that window and repeat visits are certainly advisable.

But the Toy Project uses LEGO bricks in another exciting way. The playroom is located just a few minutes down the road, which is where a lot of the charity's magic happens in the form of different activities, including several LEGO building sessions. These sessions, which are split by age groups – children, over 50s and adults more generally – provide everyone who comes through the doors the chance to relax with LEGO bricks. Boasting large windows that let in plenty of natural light, the playroom's walls are decorated with shelves ladened with LEGO sets that have been built by those who attend the sessions and in the middle of the room there's a large table for all those who come to sit around and build together.

Almost next door to the playroom, the art gallery offers the opportunity for talented local creatives to put on various shows and exhibitions and provides the community with a space to enjoy art. Children are often given the chance to participate in workshops or ask questions of the artists in residence.

Aptly, when Blocks visits the Toy Project, the theme is toys from the 1980s, with various art pieces celebrating toys from that decade, from Trolls to My Little Pony and Care Bears. There's also a nearby warehouse where new toys that will be given as gifts for Christmas or birthday are stored. Amidst ever-increasing inequality within the UK, the Toy Project offers everyone who steps inside any of its buildings the opportunity to play.

Above left: *The Play Room hosts different creative and play activities.*

Above right: *LEGO Masters donated bricks and builds to the Toy Project. LEGO sets that attendees have built decorate the shelves in the Play Room.*

Left: *Adult fans can attend evening sessions and build sets.*

Below, left to right: *Sessions allow children to get hands on with bricks.*

Emma Howat leads a build session with children.

Robert enjoys the Toy Project's over 50s build sessions.

The Play Room set up for building.

> “There was a definite need to support families in providing for their children during an expensive time of year.”

BUILDING A CHARITY

The idea for the Toy Project was conceived by Jane Garfield and Angela Donovan in 2013. “As a primary school teacher, I noticed when the children came back after Christmas, some children talked of the toys they received while some children said they’d received none,” says Jane. “I was asked why some children had a visit from Santa and some hadn’t. There was a definite need to support families in providing for their children during an expensive time of year.”

Meanwhile, Angela wanted to provide toys and resources to play therapists, who would then use them in their sessions with children who had lost a parent, a sibling or a close friend.

Although children were at the heart of the Toy Project’s inception, today the charity supports a wide range of people, including homeless families, looked after children, children with complex needs and families who are struggling financially and institutions (including schools, nurseries, hospitals, hospices, refugee centres and prisons).

The charity initially ran out of Jane’s living room as a side project whilst she continued to work as a teacher. However, demand quickly outstripped the space, so she rented storage in a community centre in Finsbury Park.

As the charity grew, so too did its overheads. To raise money to keep the charity going, Jane opened a pop-up shop in 2016 on Junction Road so that children could donate their old toys and then buy new ones in the same space; the shop’s success led to it becoming a permanent fixture, although within a year the charity moved a few doors down to a bigger space.

Since then, 81 Junction Road has been the Toy Project’s home and Jane is now the charity’s director. “The purpose of the project now is to provide an equal access to play for all,” Jane states.

PLAYING IN A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The Toy Project’s shop is filled with used toys that have been donated and are now looking for a new home. These donations are from both the public and businesses, with some set aside to go to the playroom for the LEGO sessions or given away to those in need.

These toys come from both the public and companies. The Gatwick Airport LEGO Store manager sends sets in damaged boxes, as does Selfridges, which also provides its Christmas display. Sylvanian Families also donates excess stock of their charming animal figurines. Plus, it’s not just toys that get donated – when Blocks arrives to see the Toy Project in full flow, there are silver helium balloons gracefully floating everywhere, giving the shop and playroom a playful feeling. They have been dropped off the same morning by a local business.

One of the Toy Project’s key areas of focus is raising awareness of and facilitating the reuse and recycling of toys – a recent shop window display had a rainbow of donated soft toys above the sign ‘Saved from landfill’. Previous research by the British Heart Foundation in 2019 found that 28% of UK parents admitted to throwing away toys that were in perfect working order; pair that statistic with the fact that hundreds of millions of toys are bought in the UK each year, the amount of potential waste is completely staggering.

It’s not just about the waste of money, either; because of the chemical composition of recycled plastic, around 80% of plastic toys cannot be recycled, meaning they just end up in landfills or incinerated, leading to chemicals and pollutants being released into the air and soil. If they end up in the ocean, the microplastics that are released will be ingested by marine animals and become part of the food chain.

The Toy Project, however, wants to make a difference by contributing to the circular economy, which has benefits not only for the environment but also the wallets of those parents who might otherwise not be able to buy their children new toys. “At the Toy Project, we continue to promote the importance of recycling unwanted toys. We encourage children to donate unwanted toys and then buy used from our shops. Sustainability is everything to us,” Jane says.

“Environmentally, it’s incredibly important – the sheer volume of waste

The Toy Project

> “The sheer volume of waste clogging up the world is outrageous and toys are some of the worst offenders.”

clogging up the world is outrageous and toys are some of the worst offenders. So much is thrown away that is perfectly usable – whether it’s defective soft toys or perfectly good LEGO bricks that are thrown away in their stores just because they’ve gotten dusty on the floor,” says Hûw Steer, one of the Toy Project’s LEGO Therapists, who runs many of the charity’s building sessions.

“There is so much more life in most toys than many realise, so much more playing to be done. We pride ourselves on providing these second, or third, or fourth, lives for these toys. The fact that recycling in this way allows the toys to be more affordable for families is the icing on the cake.”

Sustainability is also at the heart of the Toy Project’s partnership with Selfridges, one of London’s most luxurious and historically significant department stores. The two organisations connected at London Toy Fair.

HEINZ
BAKED BEANS
LEGO
NINJAGO
STAR WARS
RXT
rockspace

Left: *The shop sells a variety of toys, including LEGO sets.*

Below far left: *LEGO sets are on display in the shop window.*

Below left: *Hûw Steer has a room where he stores and arranges the Toy Project's LEGO brick collection.*

Below right: *The Selfridges concession is a place to sell desirable second-hand toys.*

Bottom right: *LEGO sets are very popular in the Selfridges mini shop.*

The original agreement was that the Toy Project would have a concession pop-up at the department store's famous London shop on Oxford Street for three months. This stall, which is part of the Reselfridges initiative, sells both pre-loved toys (including collectible and antique toys) as well as accepting donations. Four years on, the relationship continues to go from strength to strength, with toy surgeries held sporadically.

The relationship is no doubt symbiotic, with the Toy Project reaching a wider audience (and hopefully benefitting from a few donations and the income generated from sales), whilst Selfridges gets to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability (the company aims for circular products to make up 45% of all transactions by 2030).

A LOCAL CHARITY WITH GLOBAL REACH

The Toy Project also partners with charities and businesses that sponsor the various activities in the playroom, often one month at a time. Support from the Arsenal Foundation, which looks to provide grants to groups helping young people achieve their potential, for example, enabled the Toy Project to begin LEGO brick-based therapy sessions. Other contributors have included the National Lottery (which provides funding for groups to support their local communities) and Islington council.

Companies can also arrange a volunteer day with the Toy Project and provide some day-to-day support to the charity's various offerings, for example helping to sort and piece together the LEGO sets that are donated.

Community is essential to the Toy Project's work – alongside the individual building sessions, events focus on providing activities for local families, such as street festivals in the summer and a free play scheme for children throughout the various school holidays during the academic year.

"It's a vital part of Archway and Islington more generally. We work with so many schools and families in need it's impossible to count. Every child should have access to play and toys, especially LEGO bricks, which can be prohibitively expensive for many. The Toy Project provides that access, whether it's through our workshops, through providing schools with resources or through supporting families directly," Hûw says.

LEGO clubs are not uncommon in schools across the country and the Toy Project works with and donates toys to schools, making sure they have all the right LEGO pieces so that the children who attend can fully flex their imaginations and turn their ideas into something tangible.

"The Toy Project provides toys for anyone in need, from individual families to schools – and there are quite a few schools running LEGO clubs of their own in need of bricks. Thankfully, we've got a lot to hand. Schools starting out will need a big box or two, but some of the more established clubs might ask for more specific parts like wheels and windows, all of which I can put together when needed," Hûw explains.

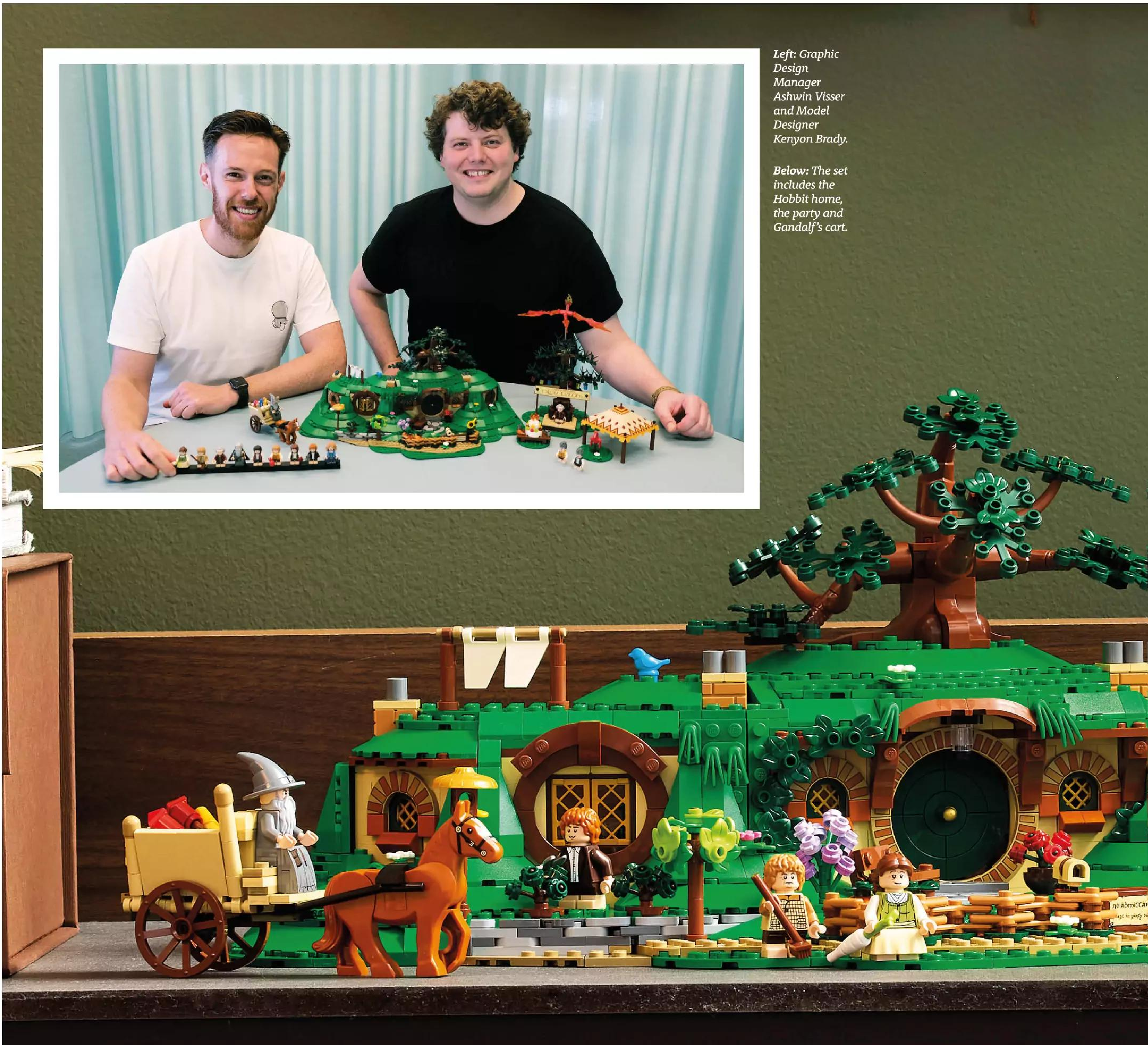
The charity supports children not only in the UK but also internationally too, having sent toys and books to India, Africa and the Caribbean. These donations can often be transformative for a young person. In July 2024, the Toy Project arranged for boxes to be sent to the Medina Children's Library in Fez, Morocco – the donations were the first time the children had ever seen or played with LEGO bricks.

Although the project continues to be very successful, this comes with its own problems. "The biggest challenge is, and always will be, space – we never have enough and rent is so expensive," Jane says. Nonetheless, the team hope that in the future they will be able to offer further stalls and units in other high-street shops that sell 'saved from landfill' toys.

Jane's passion to not only increase access to play but also to educate children about the importance of reusing has had a tangible impact, which is apparent from the smiling faces of people – young and old – sitting and building together. The Toy Project's importance to the local community was recently recognised when the shop received the ultimate accolade – it has its own space on the Hampstead and Highgate edition of Monopoly.

For a charity that's focused on the importance of play, being included on a boardgame is a fitting marker of its success so far. Both figuratively and literally, the Toy Project has put itself on the map as a beacon of best practice for making a positive impact.

THE TOY PROJECT



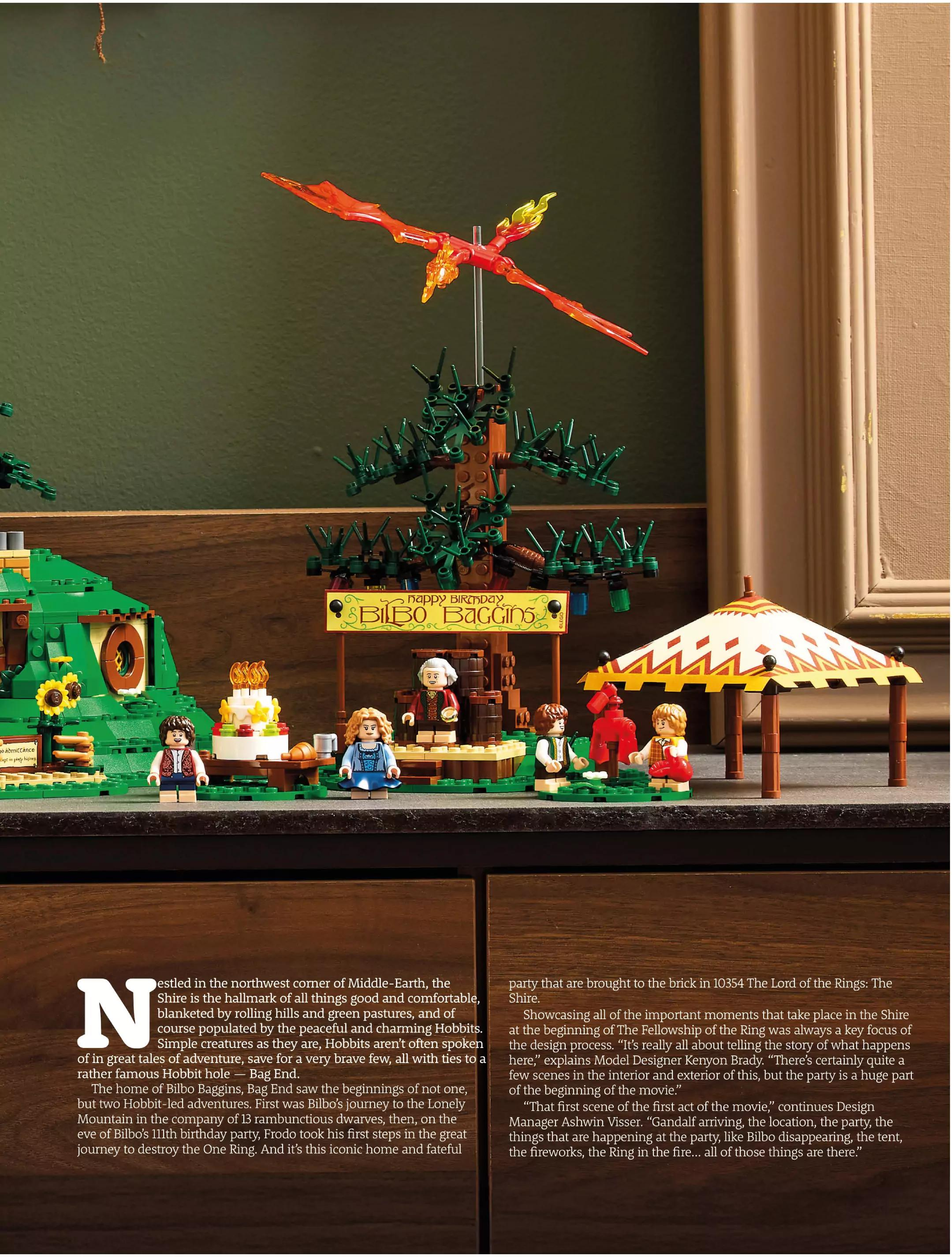
Left: *Graphic Design Manager Ashwin Visser and Model Designer Kenyon Brady.*

Below: *The set includes the Hobbit home, the party and Gandalf's cart.*

NO ADMITTANCE, EXCEPT ON BRICK BUSINESS

LEGO Icons is journeying to the Shire to celebrate Bilbo Baggins' birthday. Model Designer Kenyon Brady and Design Manager Ashwin Visser discuss the intricacies of building a home and a party fit for the most famous of Hobbits

Words: *Ryan Everleth* ***Interview:*** *Graham E. Hancock and Daniel Konstanski*



Nestled in the northwest corner of Middle-Earth, the Shire is the hallmark of all things good and comfortable, blanketed by rolling hills and green pastures, and of course populated by the peaceful and charming Hobbits. Simple creatures as they are, Hobbits aren't often spoken of in great tales of adventure, save for a very brave few, all with ties to a rather famous Hobbit hole — Bag End.

The home of Bilbo Baggins, Bag End saw the beginnings of not one, but two Hobbit-led adventures. First was Bilbo's journey to the Lonely Mountain in the company of 13 rambunctious dwarves, then, on the eve of Bilbo's 111th birthday party, Frodo took his first steps in the great journey to destroy the One Ring. And it's this iconic home and fateful party that are brought to the brick in 10354 The Lord of the Rings: The Shire.

Showcasing all of the important moments that take place in the Shire at the beginning of The Fellowship of the Ring was always a key focus of the design process. "It's really all about telling the story of what happens here," explains Model Designer Kenyon Brady. "There's certainly quite a few scenes in the interior and exterior of this, but the party is a huge part of the beginning of the movie."

"That first scene of the first act of the movie," continues Design Manager Ashwin Visser. "Gandalf arriving, the location, the party, the things that are happening at the party, like Bilbo disappearing, the tent, the fireworks, the Ring in the fire... all of those things are there."

IN A HOLE IN THE GROUND

Digging out a home in the side of a hill is no easy task, nor is recreating that home in LEGO bricks. Bag End first appeared in the brick in 2012, as the focal point of 79003 An Unexpected Gathering. While a lovely model in its own right, the set favoured playability over exact geographic accuracy, straightening edges for a cleaner appearance. When working on 10354, the designers made sure to better capture the flowing natural shape of Bag End as seen in the films.

"That was something I actually inherited from an early sketch model by [Design Master] Mike Psiaki, who worked on [10316] Rivendell," says Kenyon. "He has a great mind for triangles and how to build interesting angles. The main reason for it was to help round out the front of this, so that it feels built into a hillside, then as a bonus it breaks up the way the back looks, too.

"Having those irregular cutaways really lends itself well to the organic shaping throughout the rest of the build, because it's not a house that is perfectly squared, it's really built into nature."

Aside from its location, one of Bag End's most endearing details is its rounded door with the handle right in the centre. This key detail was instrumental in solidifying the overall scale of the model. "We went with this 6x6 round door," explains Kenyon. "We felt that it worked really nicely for Hobbit scale. You don't want it to be too big, so that it feels like a miniaturised home. Then I built it out from there."

Once the door had established the scale, Kenyon could select the right pieces for building the surrounding hill. "The rounded elements, larger ones and smaller ones, helped to give that natural, organic shaping. We have some really interesting angles splitting up the model to break it out of that rigid grid that the LEGO System is known for."

But even though the iconic exterior is so essential to what makes it a special location, the designers started work on Bag End the same way the film first introduces it — with the interior's winding, rounded halls, all littered with old maps and writings from Bilbo's adventure to Erebor.

"I knew it had to be cosy, it had to be warm and inviting. Hobbits just love to be at home with a cup of tea, cooking by the fire, so I wanted it to be a place that you really want to be in, conveyed through the building experience, too. I definitely wanted to flesh out the interior as much as possible and cram in a lot of fun details."

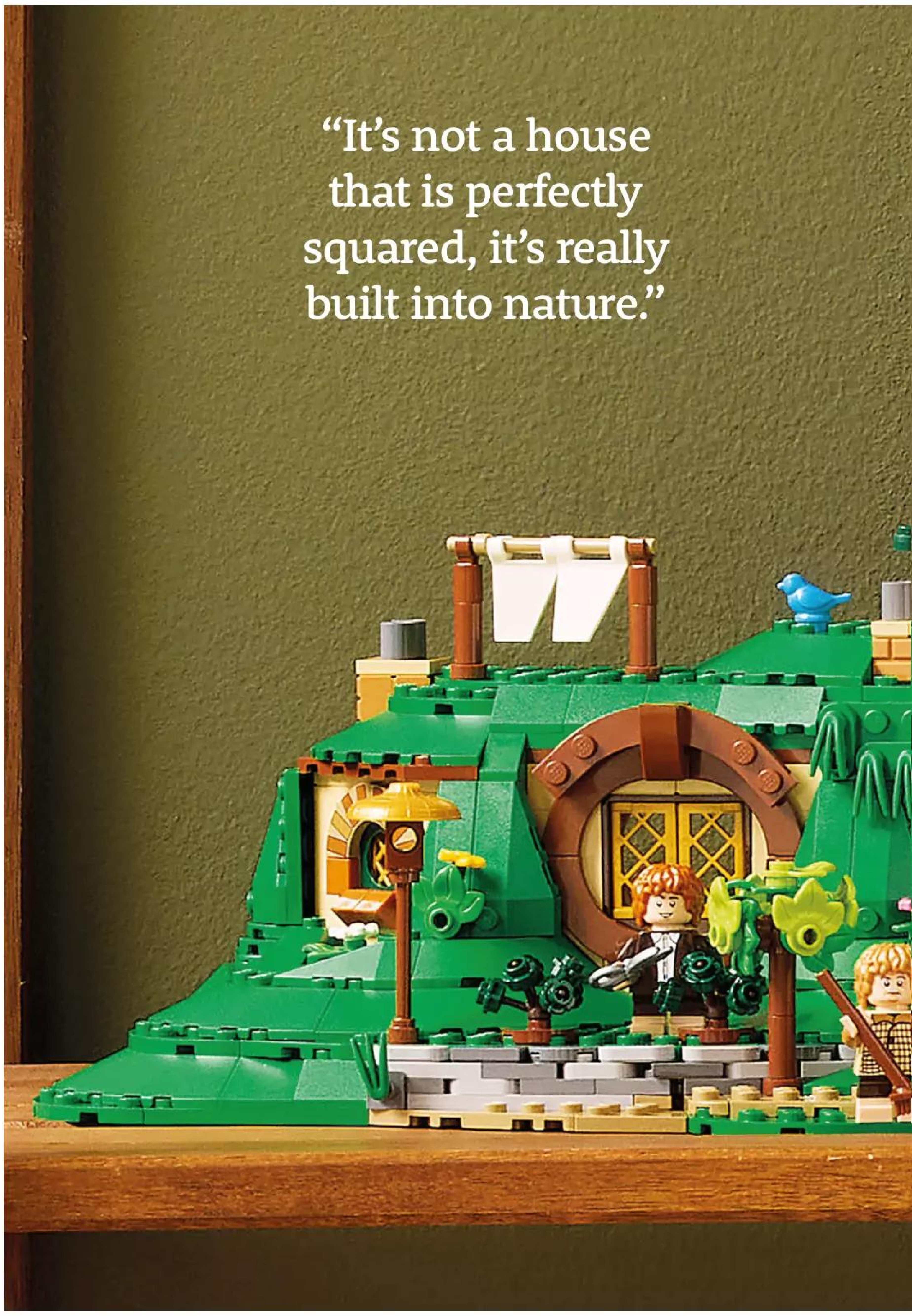
The interior is another area where the new model could differentiate itself from the previous iteration, thanks to the different source material. 79003 was based on The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey, where the dwarves barge in and have a makeshift feast, raiding Bilbo's pantry and making a mess of the dining room. 10354 takes advantage of The Fellowship of the Ring's quieter opening scenes, focusing on Bilbo's study, from where he narrates the film's second opening monologue, and the all-important entryway where Frodo first picks up the One Ring.

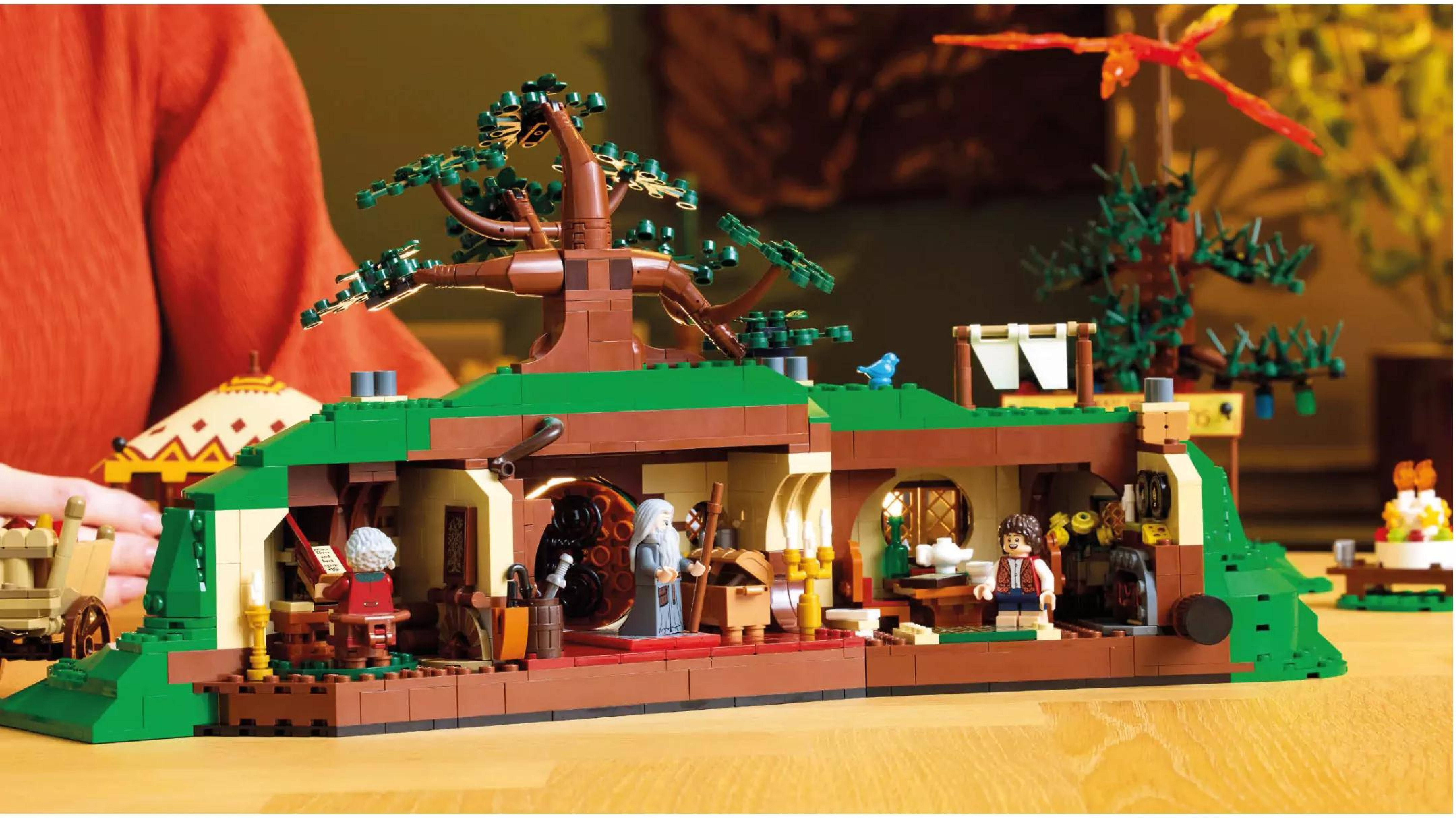
Frodo and the Ring get a little extra attention in Bag End, with a play feature built into the fireplace designed to recreate the high-stakes moment when Gandalf exposes the Black Speech written on the Ring with the heat of the flames. "In the fireplace, we have an envelope with a graphic that shows it's burning and charred. If you turn the knob, it reveals the Ring," Kenyon says as he offers a demonstration.

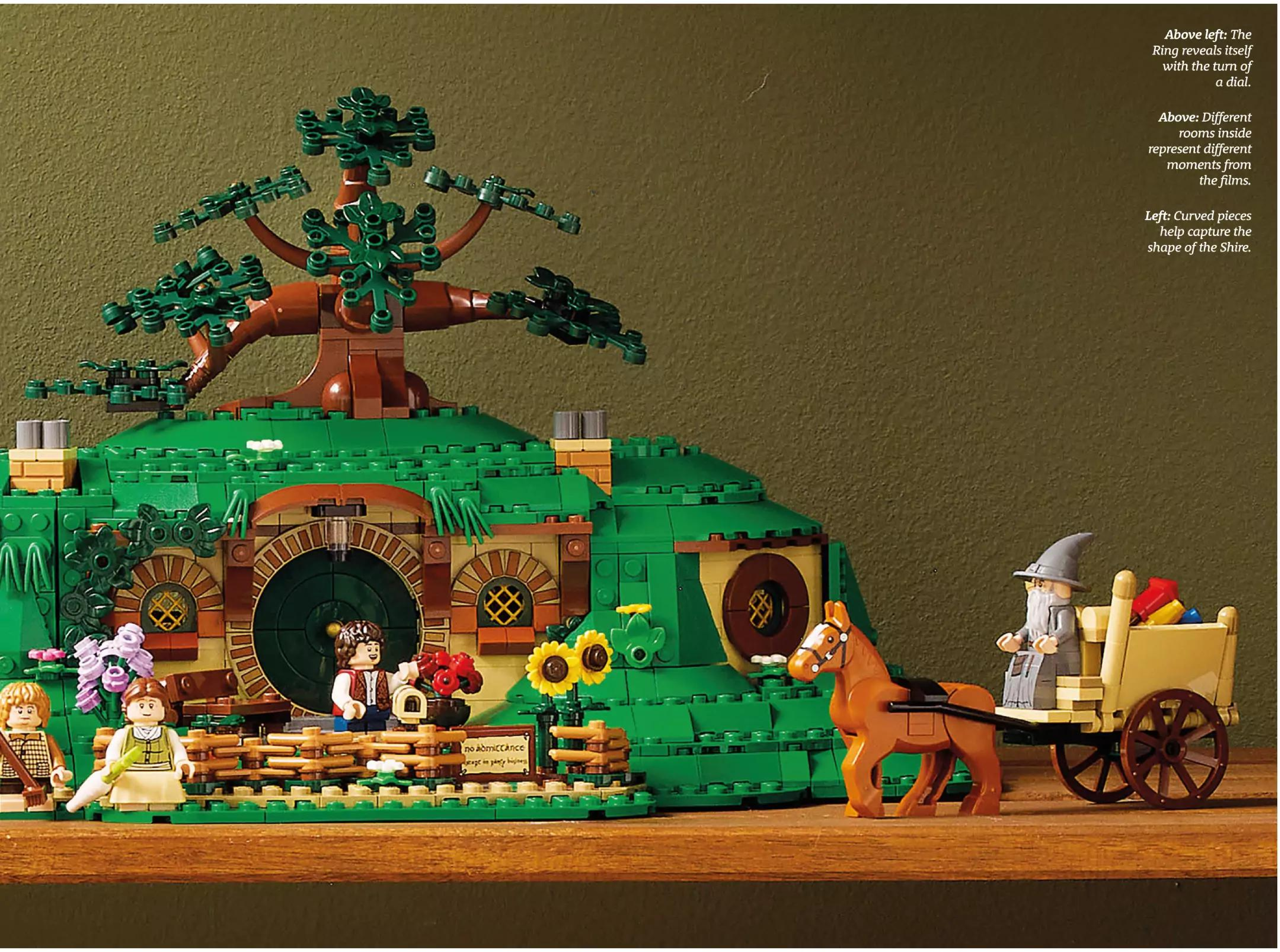
"It's not a house that is perfectly squared, it's really built into nature."

The characters are celebrating Bilo Baggins' birthday.

happy BIRTHDAY
BILBO BAGGINS






no admittance
except on party business

Above left: *The Ring reveals itself with the turn of a dial.*

Above: *Different rooms inside represent different moments from the films.*

Left: *Curved pieces help capture the shape of the Shire.*

Hobbits' love of food wasn't forgotten, either, with the last interior space dedicated to the small dining area where Gandalf and Bilbo share a cup of tea and discuss the Hobbit's plans to leave the Shire behind — a warm conversation between two friends that unwittingly sets in motion the events of The Lord of the Rings.

A LONG-EXPECTED PARTY

But for the moment, world-ending threats and perilous adventures are as far from the Hobbits' minds as can be — the night's festivities are the focus of the quaint village of Hobbiton. The celebration marks Bilbo's 111th birthday party, as such an advanced age is unusual for a Hobbit – not that Bilbo is unused to being deemed unusual.

Before any party can begin, all of the guests need to arrive. Gandalf is the only out-of-towner showing up (the book's dwarf attendees were left off the invite list for the films and the LEGO set). The wizard turns up in his trusty cart, packed full of fireworks to entertain the Hobbits. The cart is a subtle remake of another old set — 9469 Gandalf Arrives — using the same wheels but redesigning the rest of the vehicle, down to the colour of the horse.

The party itself is represented by a handful of key side builds, including one of the tents, the birthday banner and the tree under which Bilbo gives his brief and baffling speech.

Of the many tents that fill the party grounds, the designers selected the one that is being chaotically erected in the film, with its bright colours and sharp triangular pattern. "The tent really adds some of that soft, warm charm," Kenyon says. "To really ground you in that world it's cloth, it's not the more plasticky material that we sometimes use."

Bilbo's big birthday banner is also remarkably true to the source material, featuring lettering that appears hand-written with the signature font used by the Hobbits. The decoration is strung up right in front of the Party Tree.

When Bilbo gets up to deliver his celebratory speech, he does so beneath

EVERY LEGO SHIRE SO FAR

79003
An Unexpected Gathering

The only other full-sized recreation of a Hobbit hole, 79003 An Unexpected Gathering released in 2012 in preparation for the first Hobbit film. Despite being more than a decade old, the set's depiction of Bag End is as cosy as ever. Flowers and bushes dot the exterior, and there's plenty of space inside for the dwarves to have their feast of whatever they can pillage from Bilbo's cupboards. The four dwarf minifigures and Bilbo are all exclusive, while Gandalf has his classic outfit and hat.

LEGO
THE HOBBIT
8-14
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Micro Scale Bag End

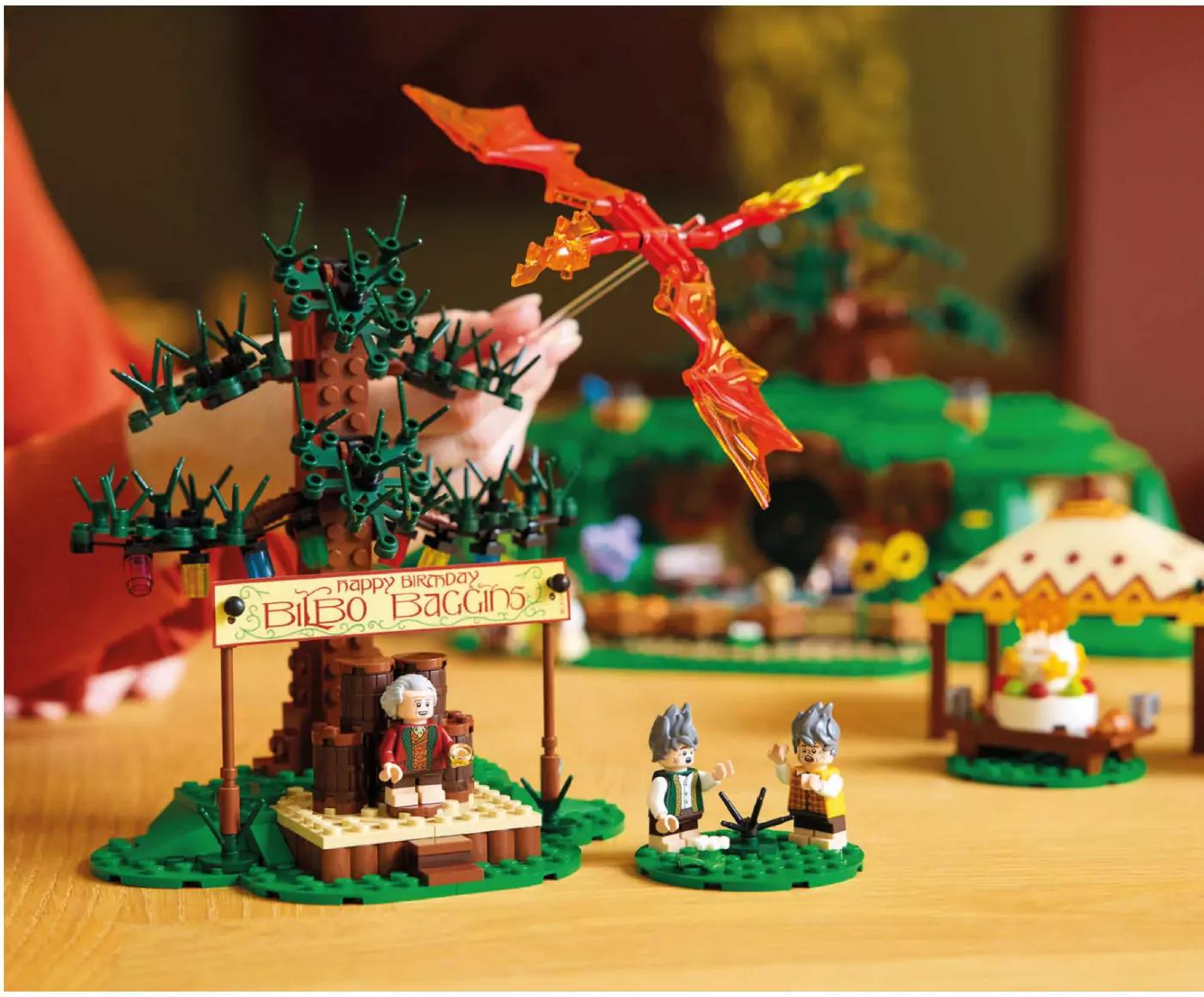
Comic Con exclusive sets are controversial among fans, but you'd be hard pressed to get mad at Micro Scale Bag End. The set is a charming 130-piece recreation of Bilbo's iconic house, complete with sloping green bricks to mimic the hill, the tree growing on the roof and the rounded door — though the 1x1 round tile used for the handle is comically large at this scale.

9469
Gandalf Arrives

While not a depiction of a location, 9469 Gandalf Arrives is a quintessential Shire set, showing the moment in which Gandalf... well, arrives and gives Frodo a lesson in wizardly timekeeping. The cart comes packed with fun surprises, mainly the fireworks destined for the night sky above Bilbo's party — the dragon firework is cleverly represented by a LEGO NINJAGO snake element. Gandalf and Frodo aren't exclusive minifigures, but getting two of the trilogy's premiere characters in a small set is nothing to scoff at.

30210
Frodo with Cooking Corner

Building with LEGO bricks always requires some imagination, but when it comes to imagining the Shire around 30210 Frodo with Cooking Corner, it might take some extra effort. A small stone stove is included and fries up some sausage while Frodo takes a goblet and turns his attention to a keg that's surely full of a family-friendly beverage. A single flower rounds out this truly remarkable set, providing the tiniest hint of the green and flowering hills of the Shire.



"Hobbits just love to be at home with a cup of tea."

Top left: *10354 is made up of 2,017 elements.*

Bottom left: *10354 The Lord of the Rings: The Shire is the smallest of the recent sets.*

Above: *Don't play with fireworks.*

the tangled branches of the Party Tree, much to the delight of the gathered crowd. But his speech quickly turns a bit sour, offering his fellow Hobbits twisting words that don't entirely make sense — at least not to the field of Hobbits enjoying their ales and pipeweed, so Bilbo seizes his chance to finally disappear.

"When he's giving his speech, we have a now you see him, now you don't function," Kenyon laughs, showing a simple but effective mechanism that allows minifigure Bilbo to vanish, albeit in slightly less magical fashion than he does on screen.

The dragon firework that gives everyone a fright after Merry and Pippin unleash it is present as well, in both its unlit and flying forms. The unlit firework has a small base built up underneath it. "You can pose them next to the firework or something like that," says Kenyon. The fiery dragon that explodes over the party is soaring up above the tree, ready to dive down and scare the Hobbits below.

HALF THE SHIRE'S BEEN INVITED

A 111th birthday party is more than enough reason to dress your best and the nine included minifigures all boast their finest outfits. Though Gandalf's finest is also his only, as he's the one minifigure in the set without an exclusive print, which is accurate to his appearance in the film.

"All of the new prints are centred around the festivity clothes that they are wearing," shares Ashwin. "We have a lot of new prints reflected in Bilbo and Frodo, Merry and Pippin. Rosie is, of course, new for the first time."

Rosie Cotton is a fairly minor character in the films in terms of screen time, only appearing at the very beginning and very end of the trilogy. But she still carries a great deal of importance, being Sam's love interest and one of his most treasured memories from the Shire during the journey.

The other two completely new characters are Everard and Aurora Proudfoot, whose faces are perhaps more recognisable than their names. The grumpy-looking Hobbits' claim to fame comes when Gandalf launches a few fireworks from his cart, to the joy of the children chasing behind. Everard cracks a smile — much to the disdain of his wife, Aurora.

"These are just two grumpy people," says Ashwin. "If you know the movie, then you recognise them."

"We thought it'd be great to expand beyond the core cast in order to fill out a party scene. We reached a little bit to find those two," Kenyon continues.

Minor characters or not, the Proudfoots were given the same attention as their famous neighbours. "We have a new element here. The skirt is a new mould," Kenyon says, pointing to Aurora's plain and straight skirt. "A little bit of an interesting choice to do a new mould as she is a side character, but we really felt it helped to fill out this world and to contrast with Rosie's skirt,

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BILBO BAGGINS

which is a new colour and it's a little more flowy and dancy because she's seen dancing in the film."

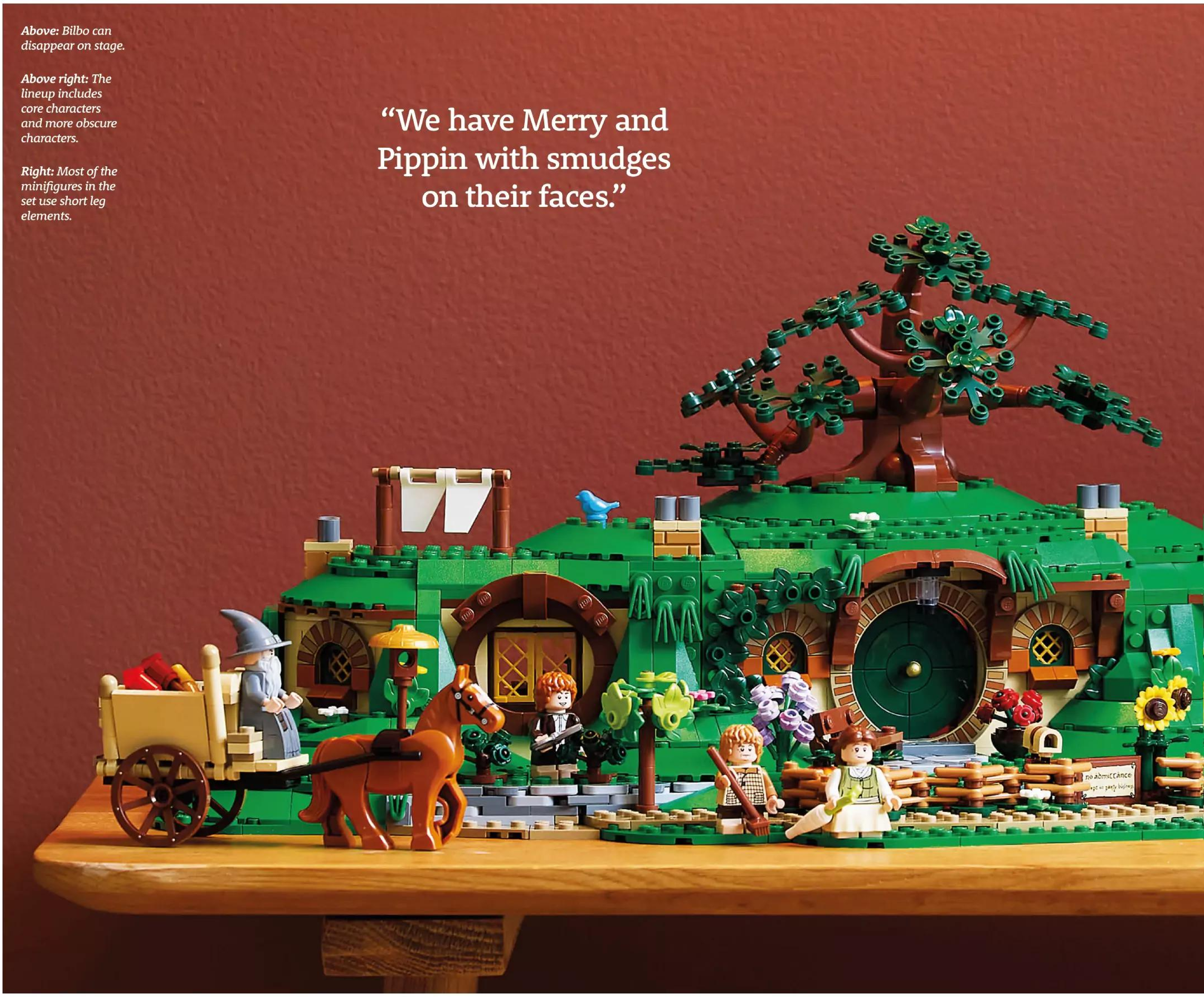
As for the main cast of characters, Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin all get new prints for their party outfits as well. When working on the set's graphic designs, Ashwin took a look at some eye-opening reference photos for his work on the costumes.

"We got the references from Warner Bros. and actually that's where I could see that they have these intricate details. I never saw the details in the movie, because the party scene is quite dark. But then I saw that Frodo's vest has these intricate flower details all around and I was like, 'oh, this is going to be a challenge.' I think I started with him just to get him out of the way."

Bilbo and Sam get pleasant new outfits as well, but Merry and Pippin proved to be the most fun to redesign, thanks to the shenanigans they pull off with Gandalf's dragon firework. "We have Merry and Pippin with smudges on their faces, because they are playing with the fireworks and we all know what happens in that scene. We included extra wigs as well to elevate that effect," Ashwin says.

The design process gave Kenyon the opportunity to look back at the source material and appreciate it in a new way. "I went back and read through the books during the process of designing this. That was a lot of fun. The development was from fall through to spring and that's sort of how the books play out. They leave in the autumn and the story ends in late spring, early summer – it was nice to read through the books at the same time."

Kenyon and Ashwin's dedication is evident in the final model, packed with details big and small. 10316 The Lord of the Rings: Rivendell conveys the seriousness of the quest, 10333 The Lord of the Rings: Barad-dûr focuses on the danger that is always present, but 10354 The Lord of the Rings: The Shire captures the whimsical beginnings of the entire tale.



Above: *Bilbo can disappear on stage.*

Above right: *The lineup includes core characters and more obscure characters.*

Right: *Most of the minifigures in the set use short leg elements.*

> "We have Merry and Pippin with smudges on their faces."

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BILBO BAGGINS
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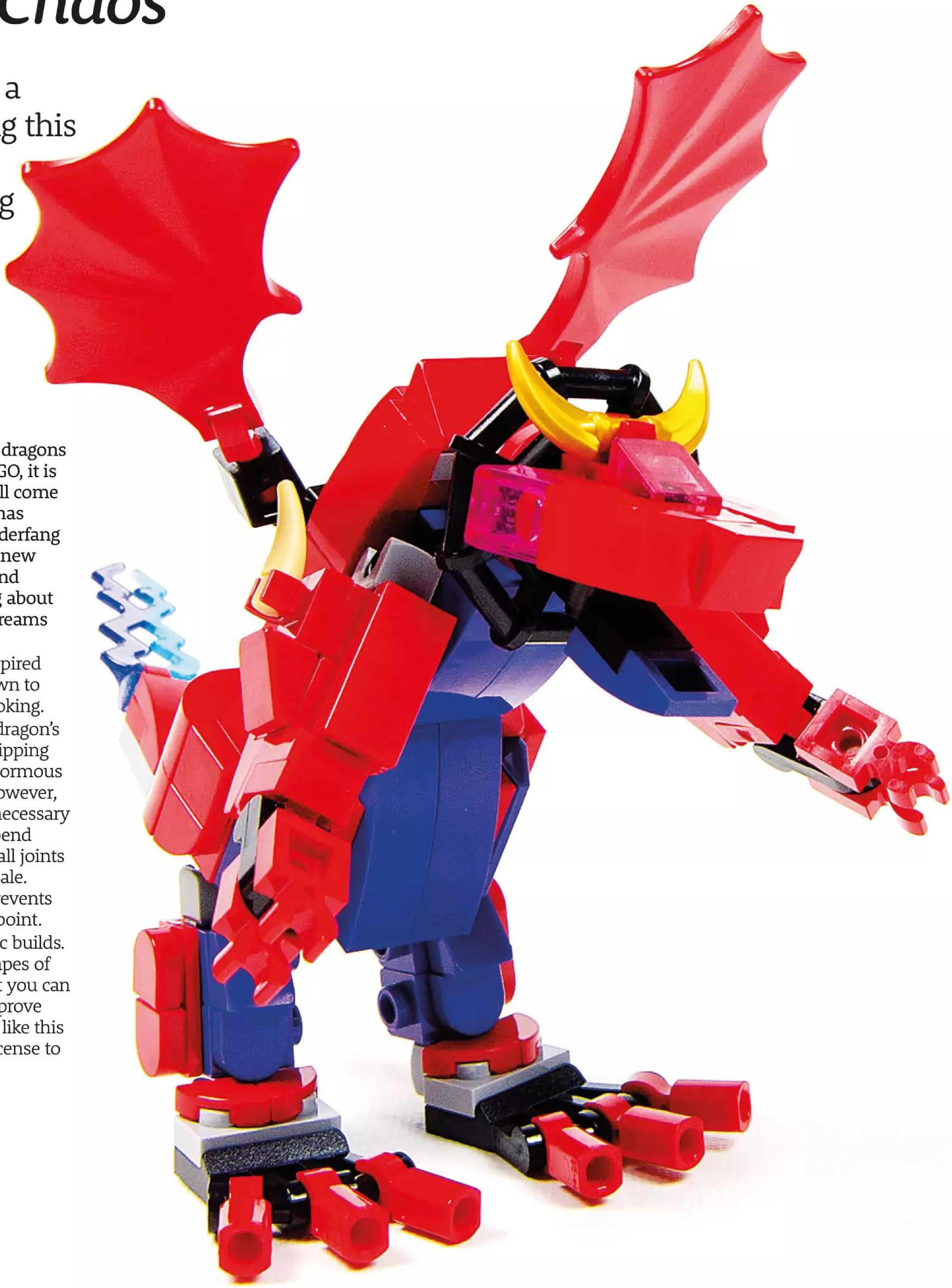
Thunderfang Dragon of Chaos

Embrace the chaos at a small scale by building this miniature version of the new fire-breathing villain from NINJAGO



Considering how many different dragons have been introduced in NINJAGO, it is incredible that designers can still come up with original looking creatures. It has happened again though – 71832 Thunderfang Dragon of Chaos presents an entirely new beast. Standing on its hind legs, tail and wings splayed out behind, everything about this creature's red and purple body screams menace.

Thunderfang's unique physique inspired this build, which shrinks the form down to something smaller, but no less evil looking.

The trickiest part is mimicking the dragon's bent over, two-legged gait without it tipping over. The full-sized dragon uses its enormous tail and wings as a counterbalance. However, that isn't an option here because the necessary articulation in the wings for them to bend backward can't be achieved without ball joints – and those are too big, even at this scale. Careful placement of legs and arms prevents tipping, giving the creature a balance point.

Small creatures like this are fantastic builds. Mimicking the organic curves and shapes of bodies at a reduced scale pushes what you can do with the LEGO System and will improve your building skills. Fantasy creatures like this are especially fun as there is a bit of license to experiment and create unique beings.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI

Get the parts list: blocksmag.com/goto/thunderfang

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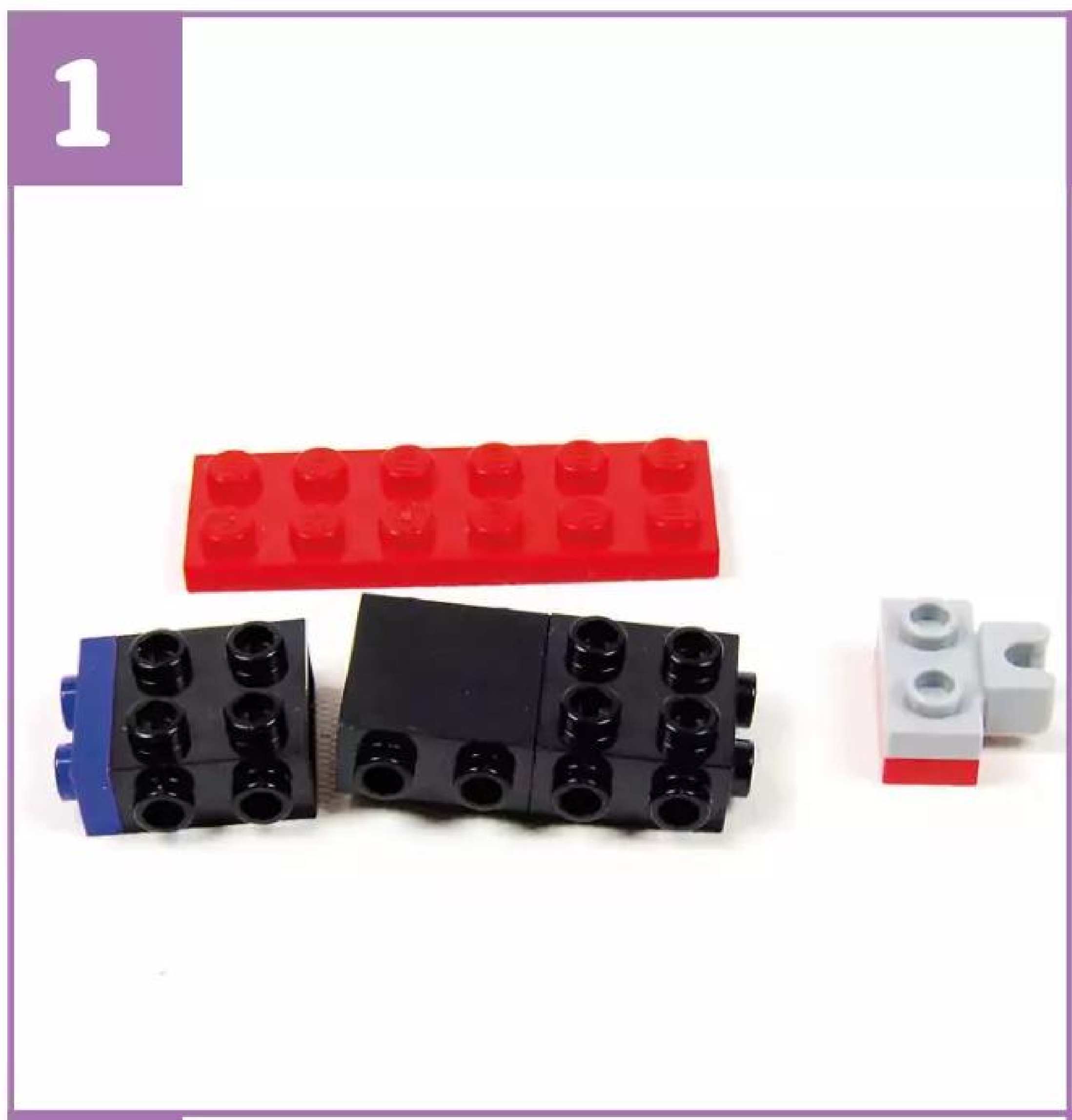

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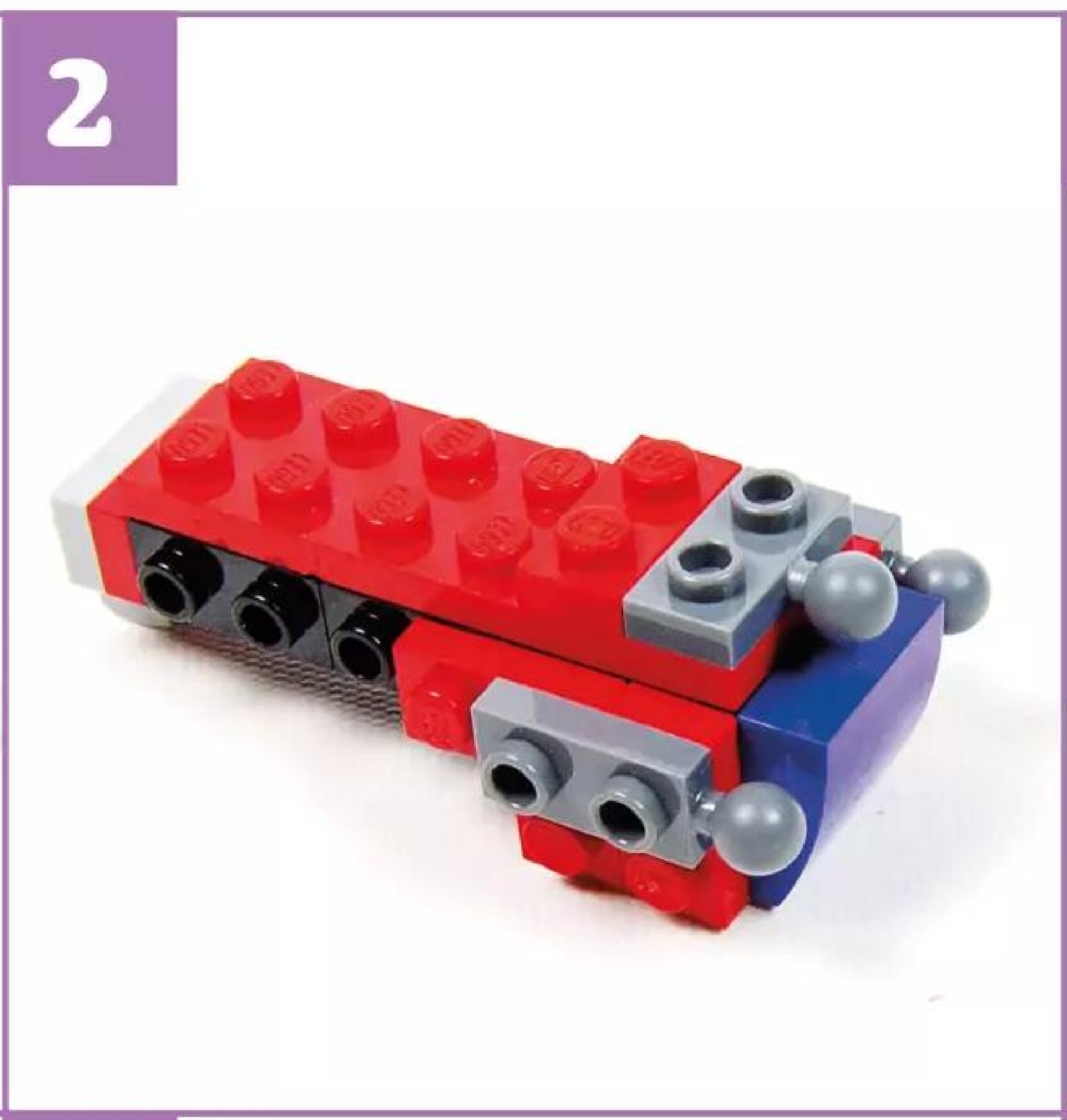

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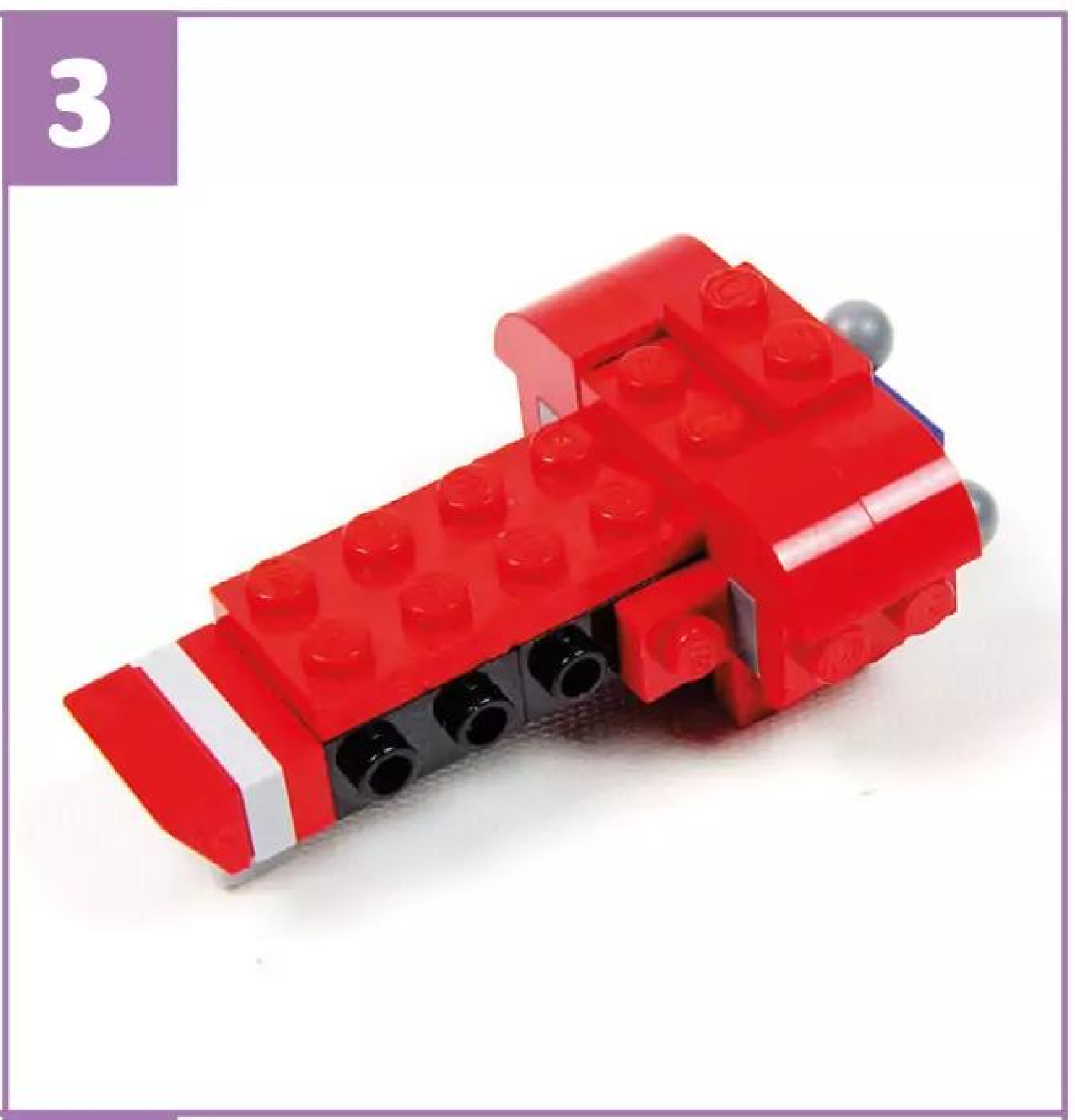

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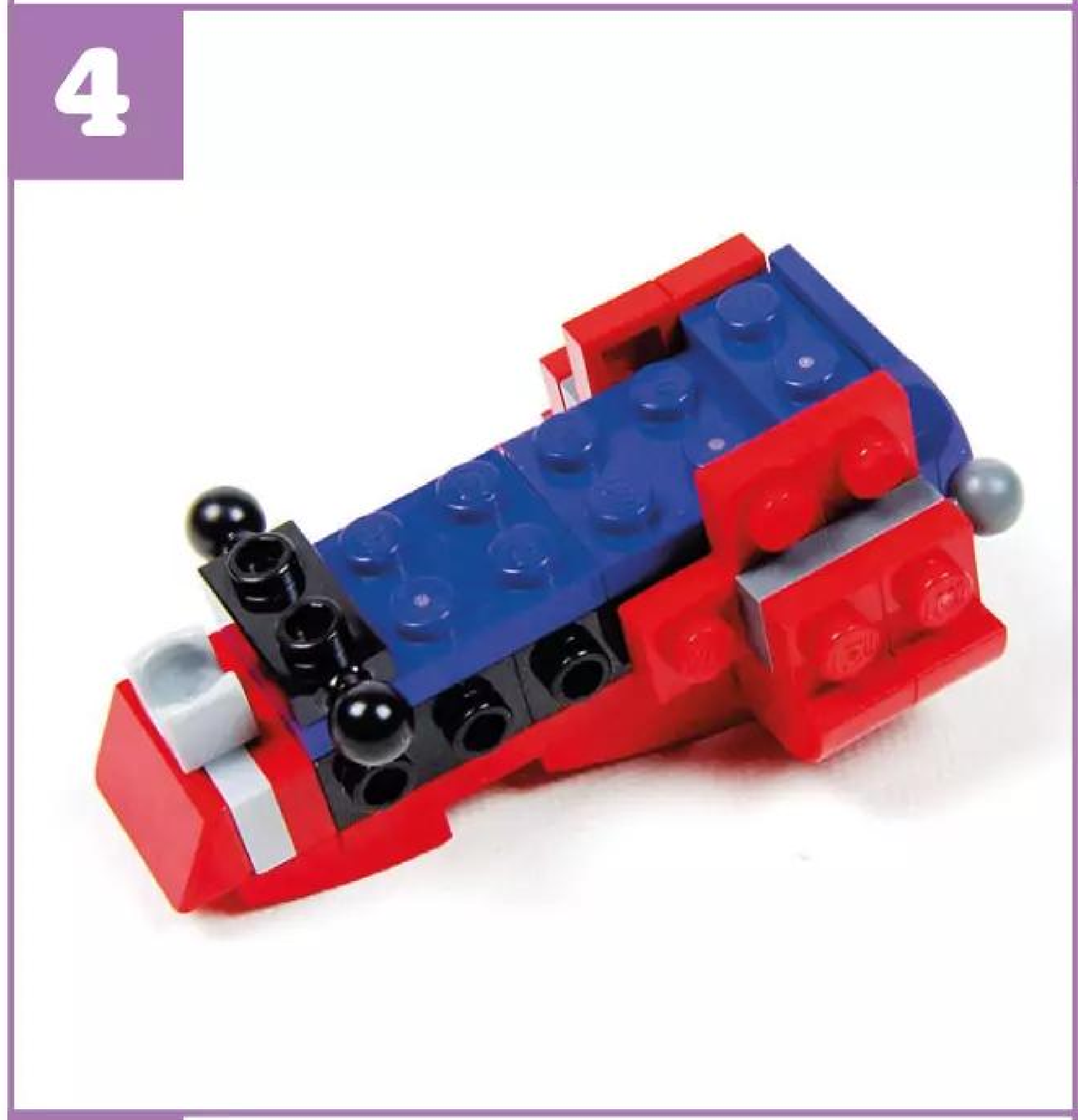

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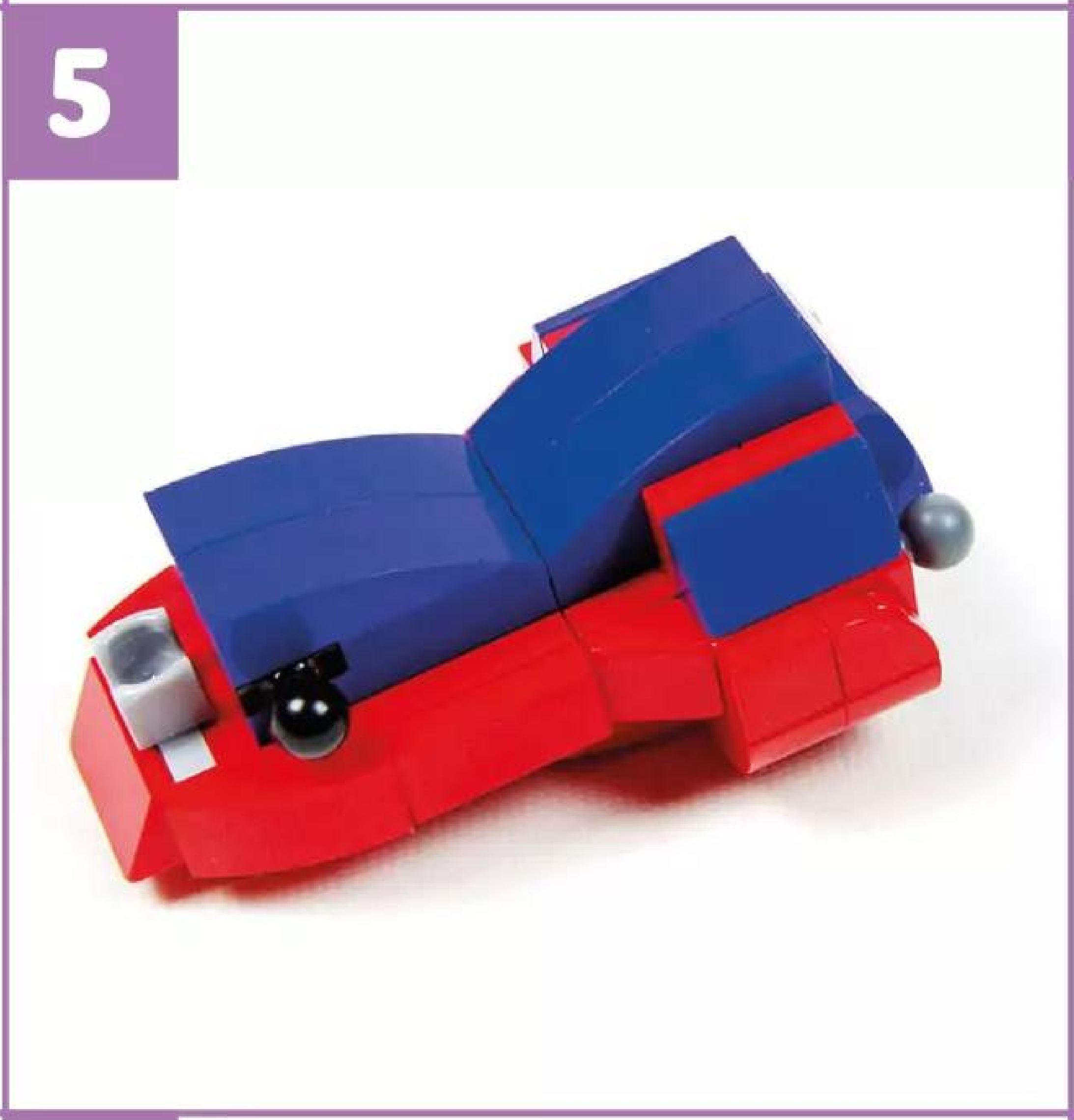

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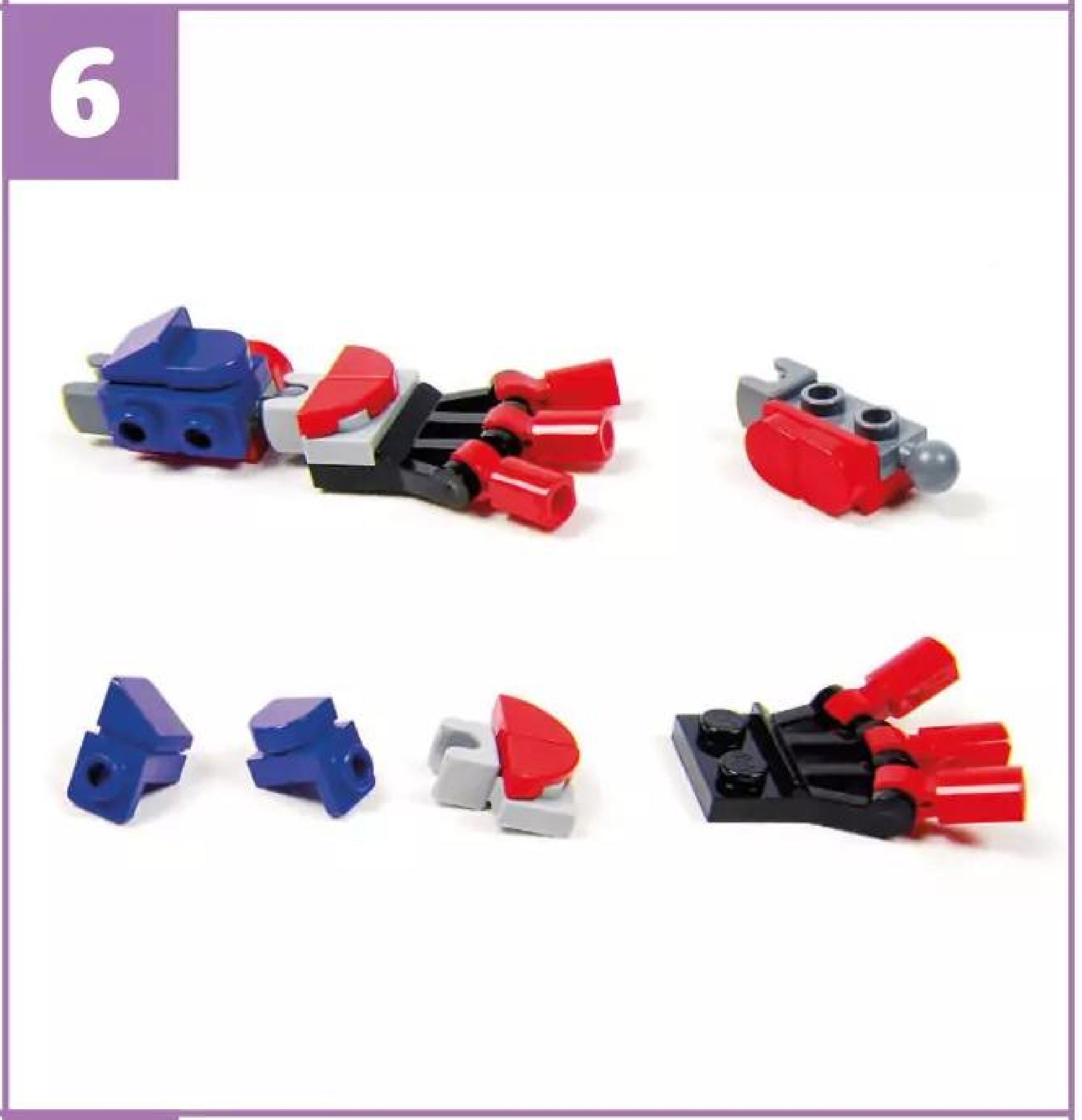

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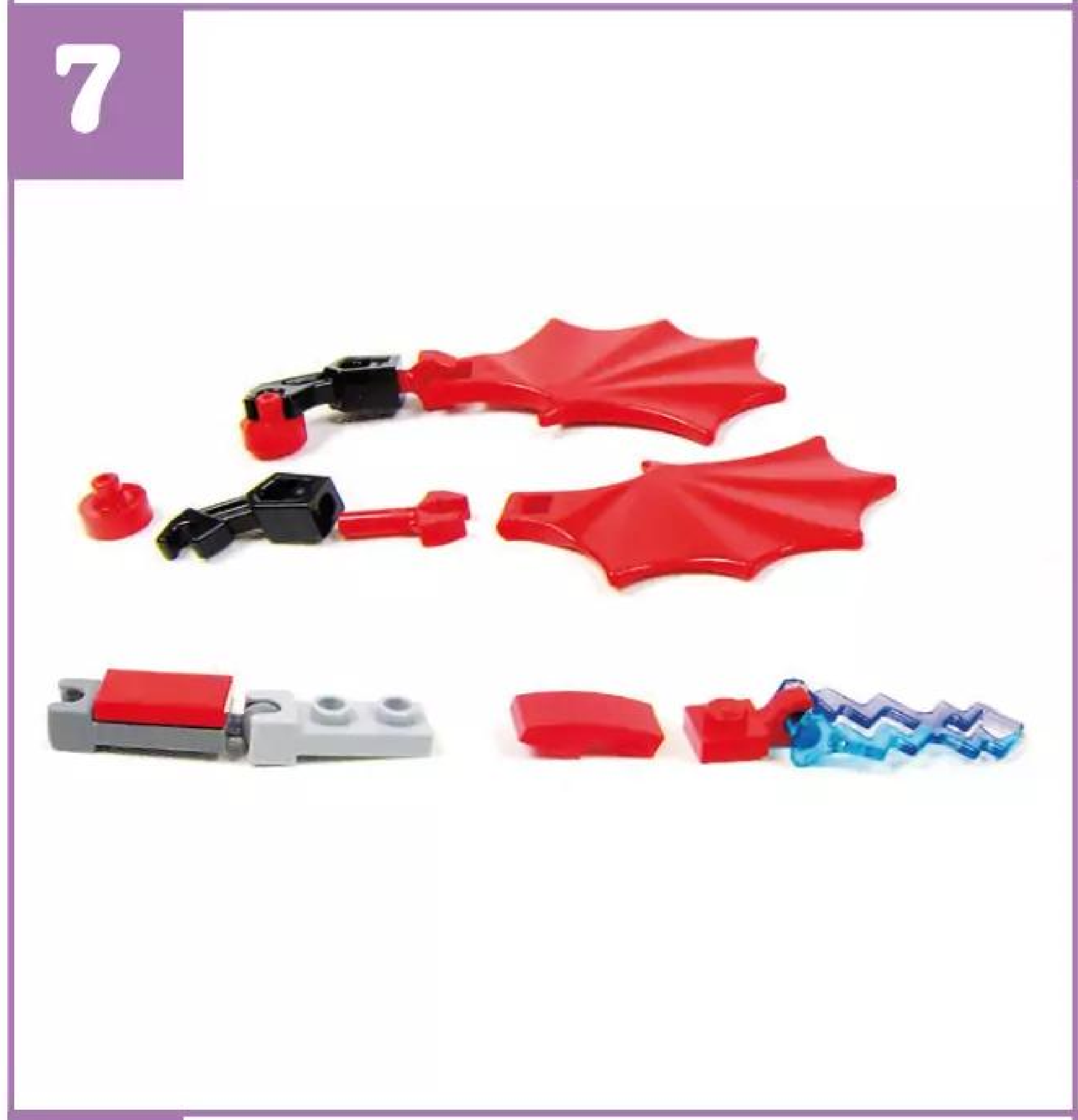

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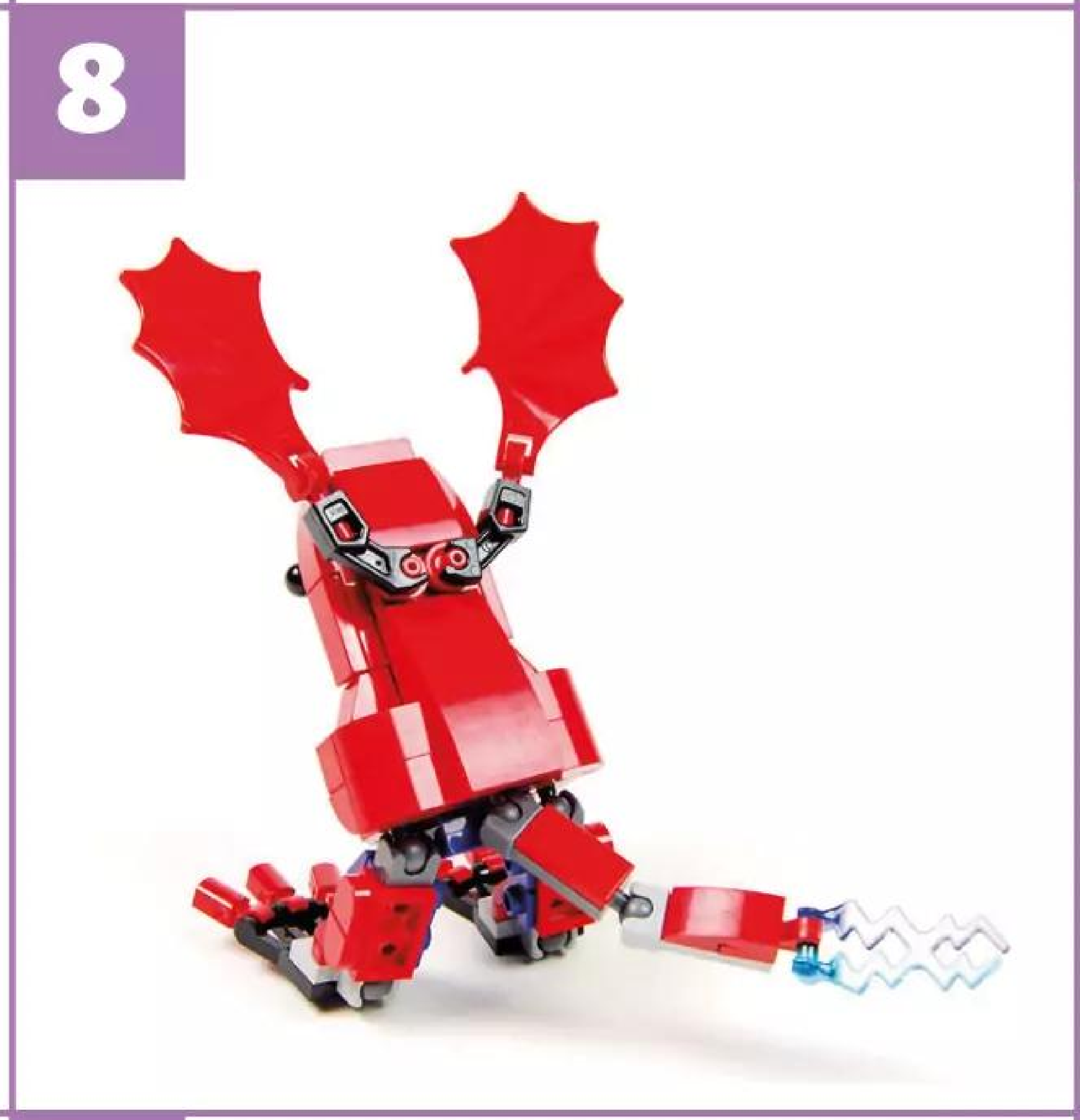

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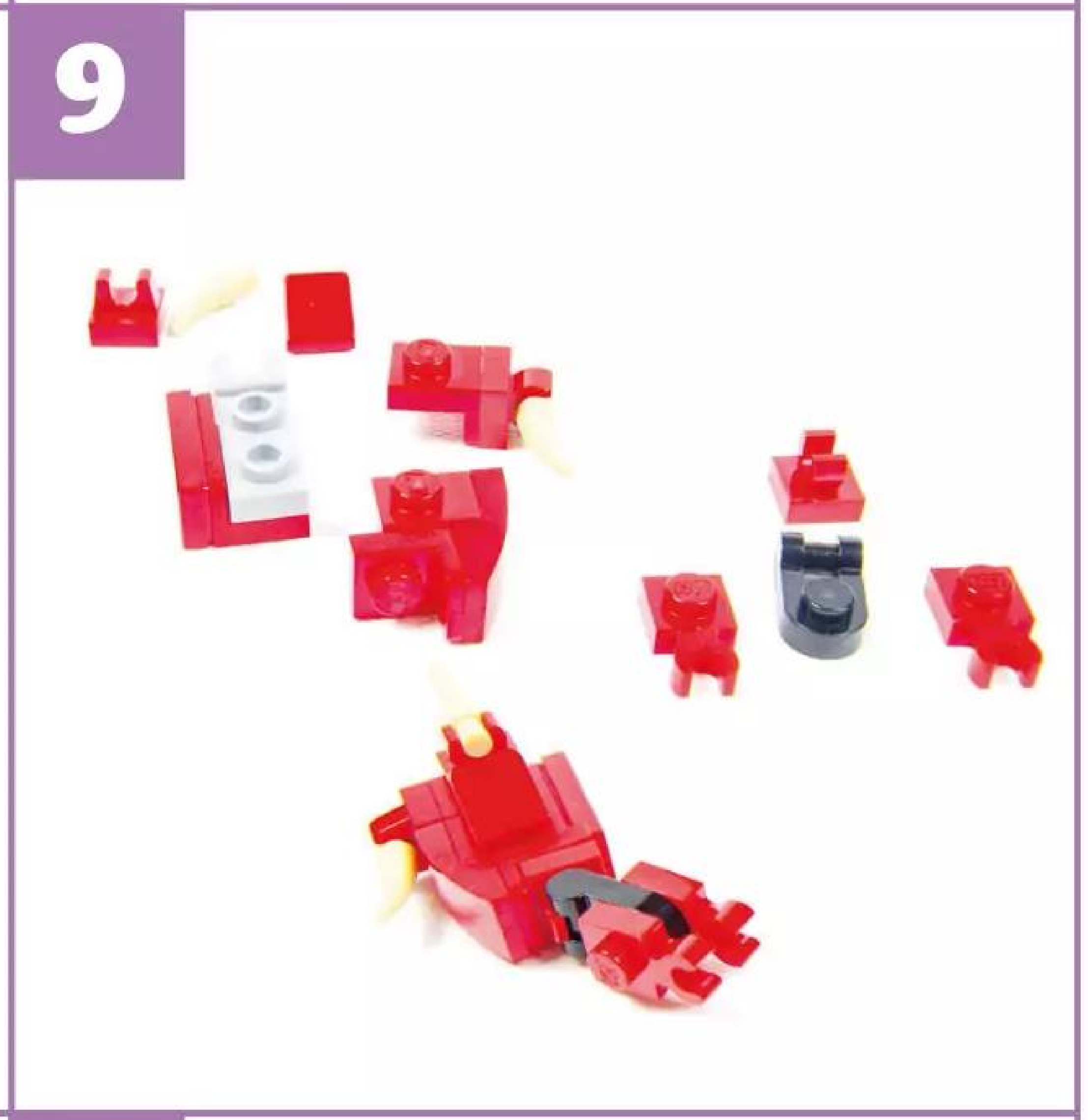

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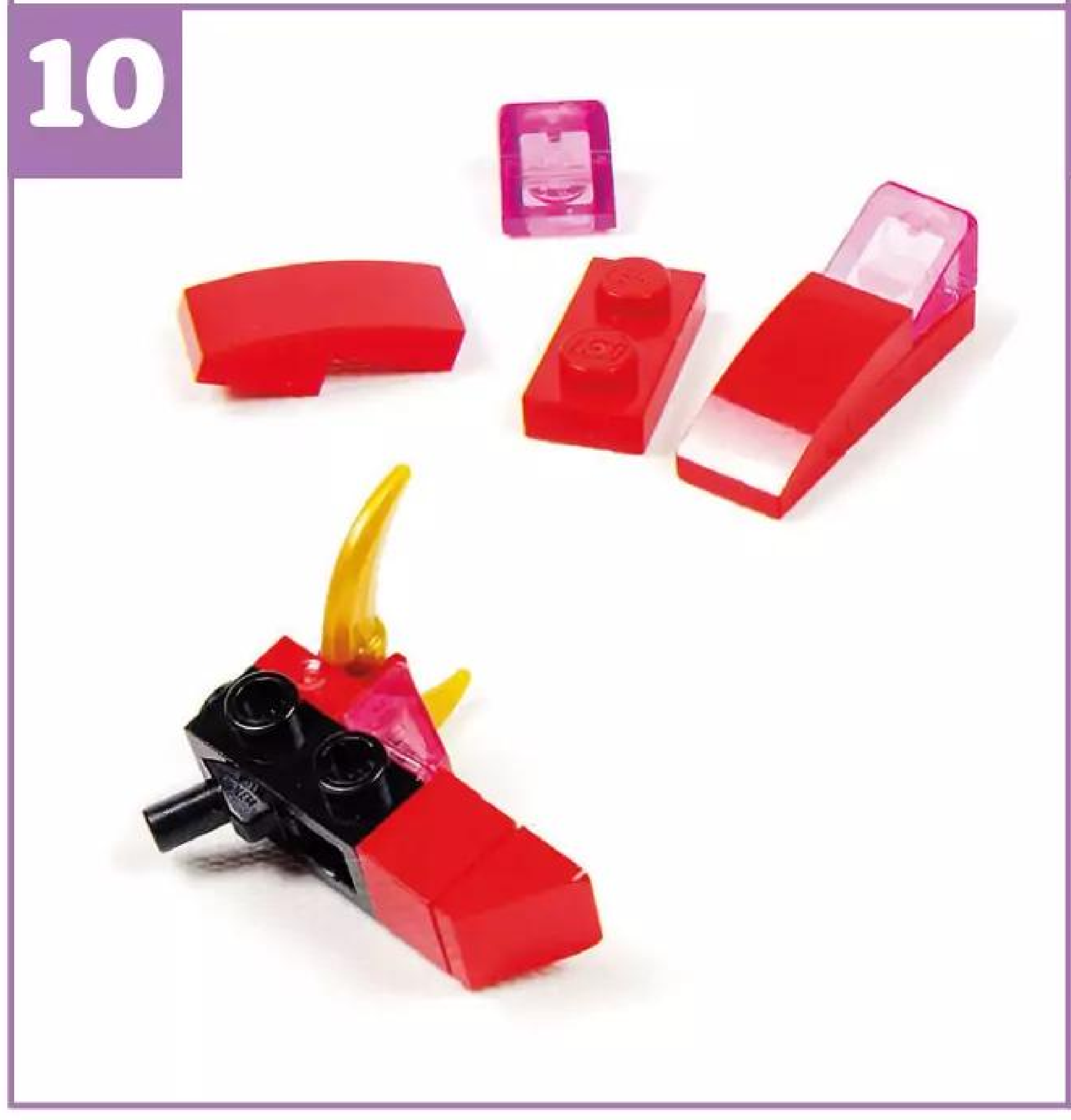

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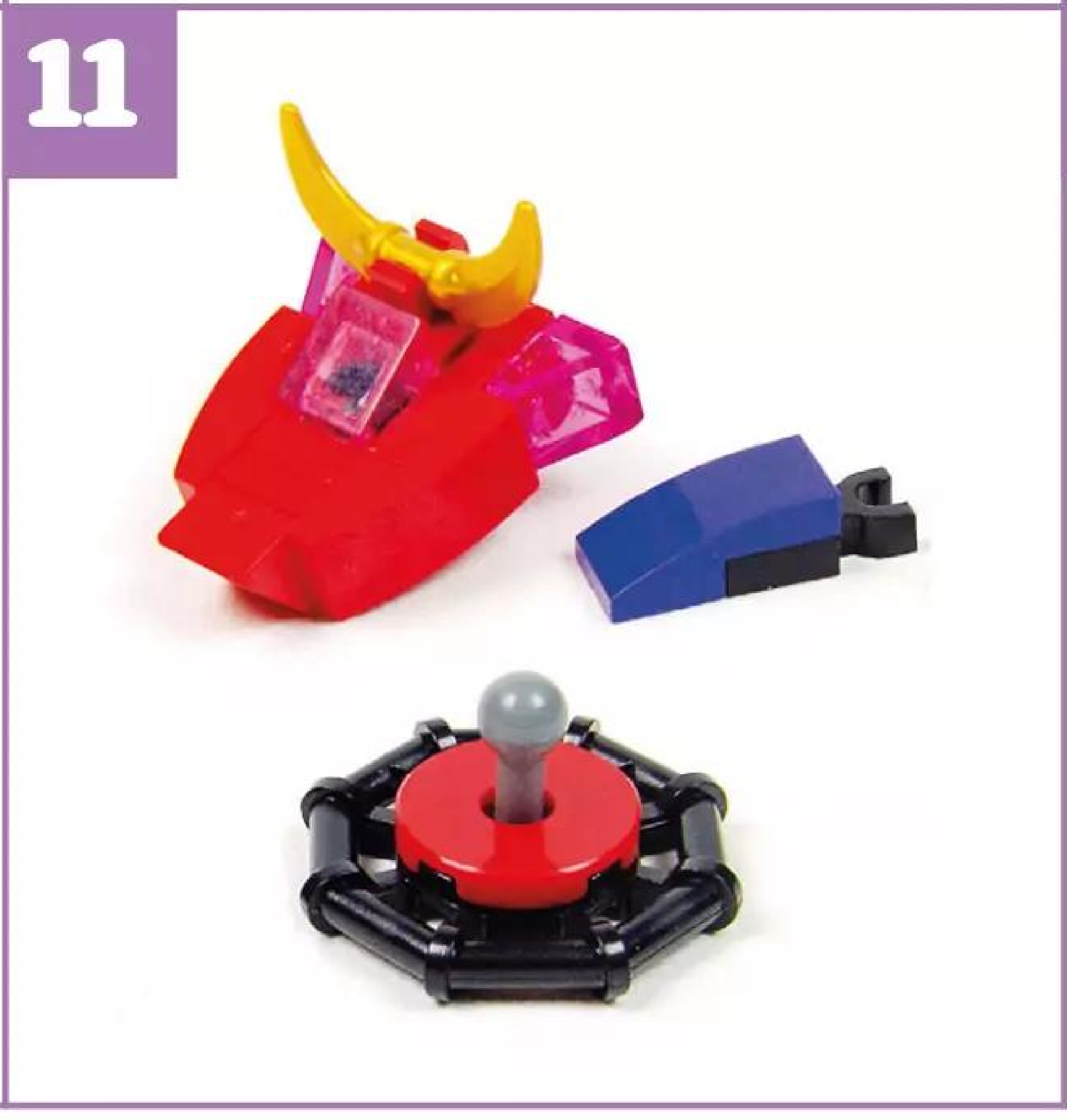

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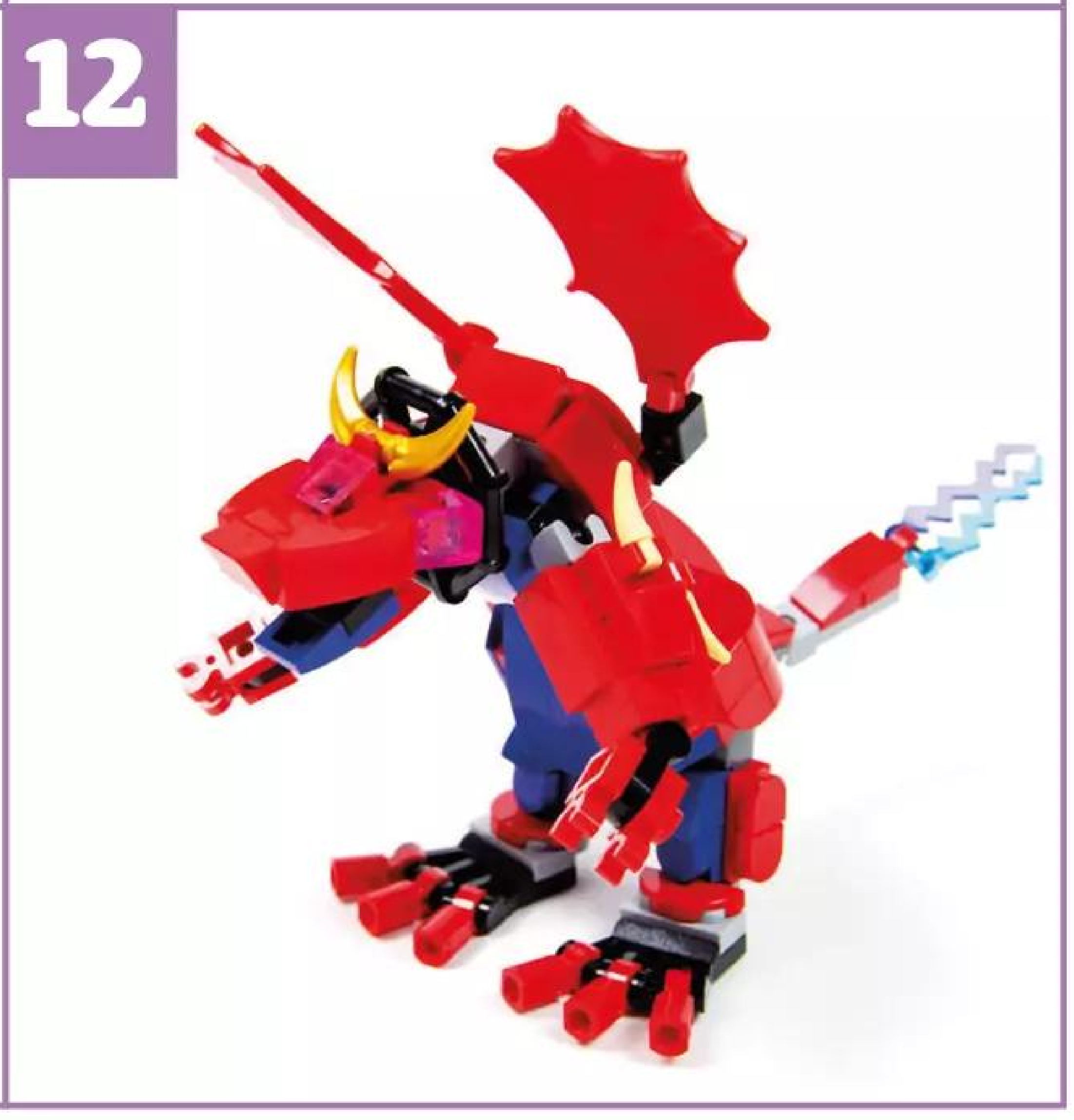


PROJECT GENESIS:
LEGO WITHOUT BRICKS

Technology, Saturday morning television and action figures – at the turn of the century, the LEGO Group was ready to leave the brick behind as part of an ambitious reimagining that could have changed the company and its products forever

__Words:__ Daniel Konstanski
Images used with permission from the LEGO Group.

LEGO designers reading the brief couldn't believe their eyes. The mandate that had come down from management in late 1999 or early 2000 was shocking. A small group of designers led by Niels Milan Pedersen were tasked with something that seemed sacrilegious – to develop a building experience that would not use any bricks. The core of the LEGO System in Play – studs and tubes – was to be abandoned.

This top-secret mission was named Project Genesis and it intended to completely transform the LEGO Group into a totally different kind of toy company. It would be the most radical shift since second-generation owner Godtfred Kirk Christiansen decided to discontinue wooden toys and focus entirely on plastic.

GROWING FEARS

The initial brief was somewhat limited, but like a small snowball rolling down a hill, growing bigger and bigger until it turns into an avalanche, Project Genesis quickly became something enormous and out of control.

In 1998, the LEGO Group posted its first loss since anyone had been paying attention. The company's construction toys were increasingly being eclipsed by action figures and franchise tie-ins. As a result, management were throwing risky mandates and directives downstream that often didn't fit any overall strategy and were not as vetted as they should have been. Decisions were being made out of panic.

All of the Saturday morning cartoons had toy lines, many of which were starting to incorporate digital technology. Some of these were owned by the same companies that manufactured the toys themselves, while some just had long-lasting partnerships. Big budget movies always launched with big toy lines. Tie-in video games were becoming more common for both animated shows and feature films.

Such multimedia juggernauts were capturing the attention of children and never letting go. The constant exposure to the same characters across shows, video games and physical toys was proving a powerful tool for driving interest in children and sales to their parents.

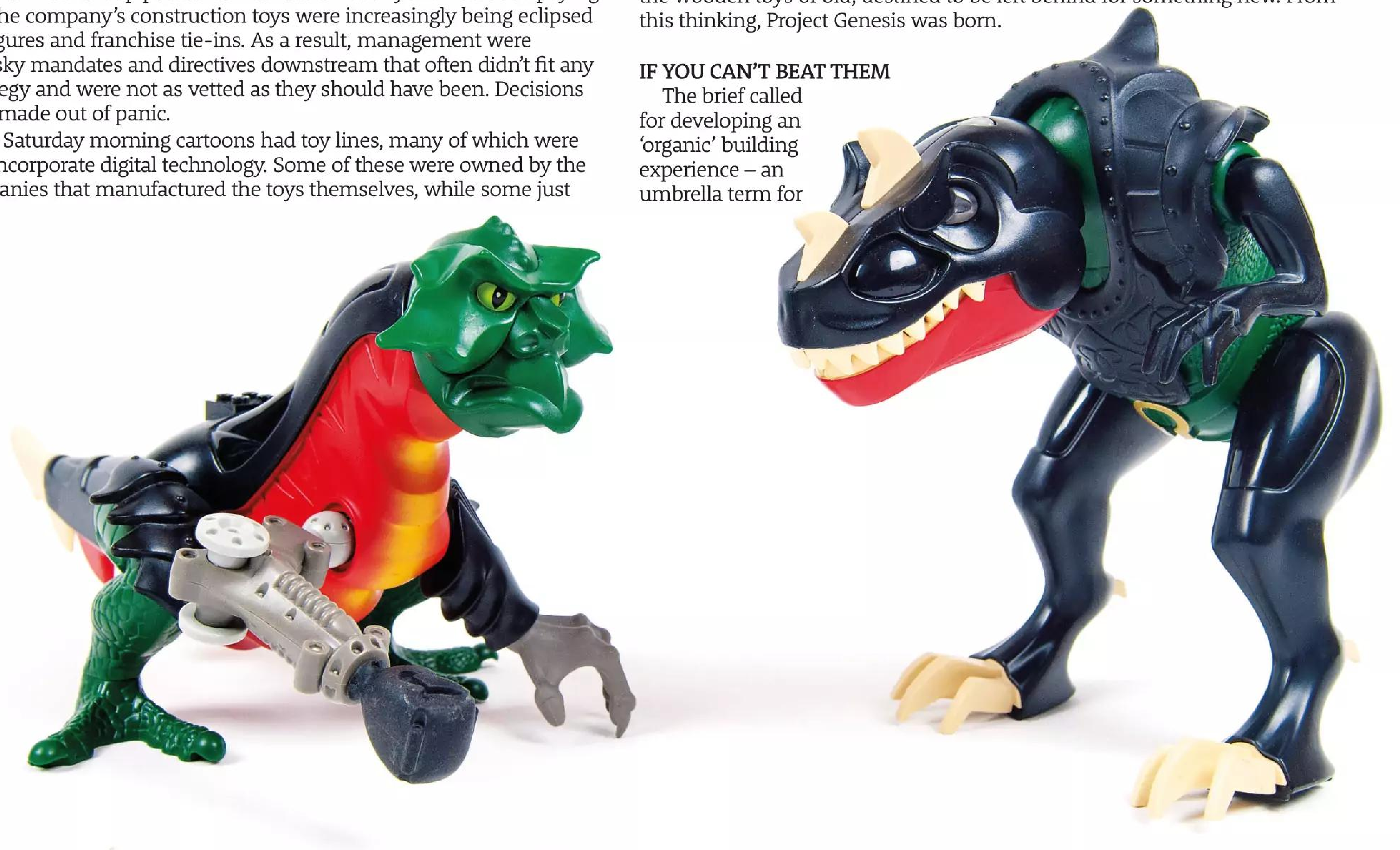
Alongside this, the LEGO Group's leaders were losing faith that childrens would still be willing to sit for hours constructing a model made of bricks, when other toys came fully formed out of the box. The theory was that attention spans were shortening.

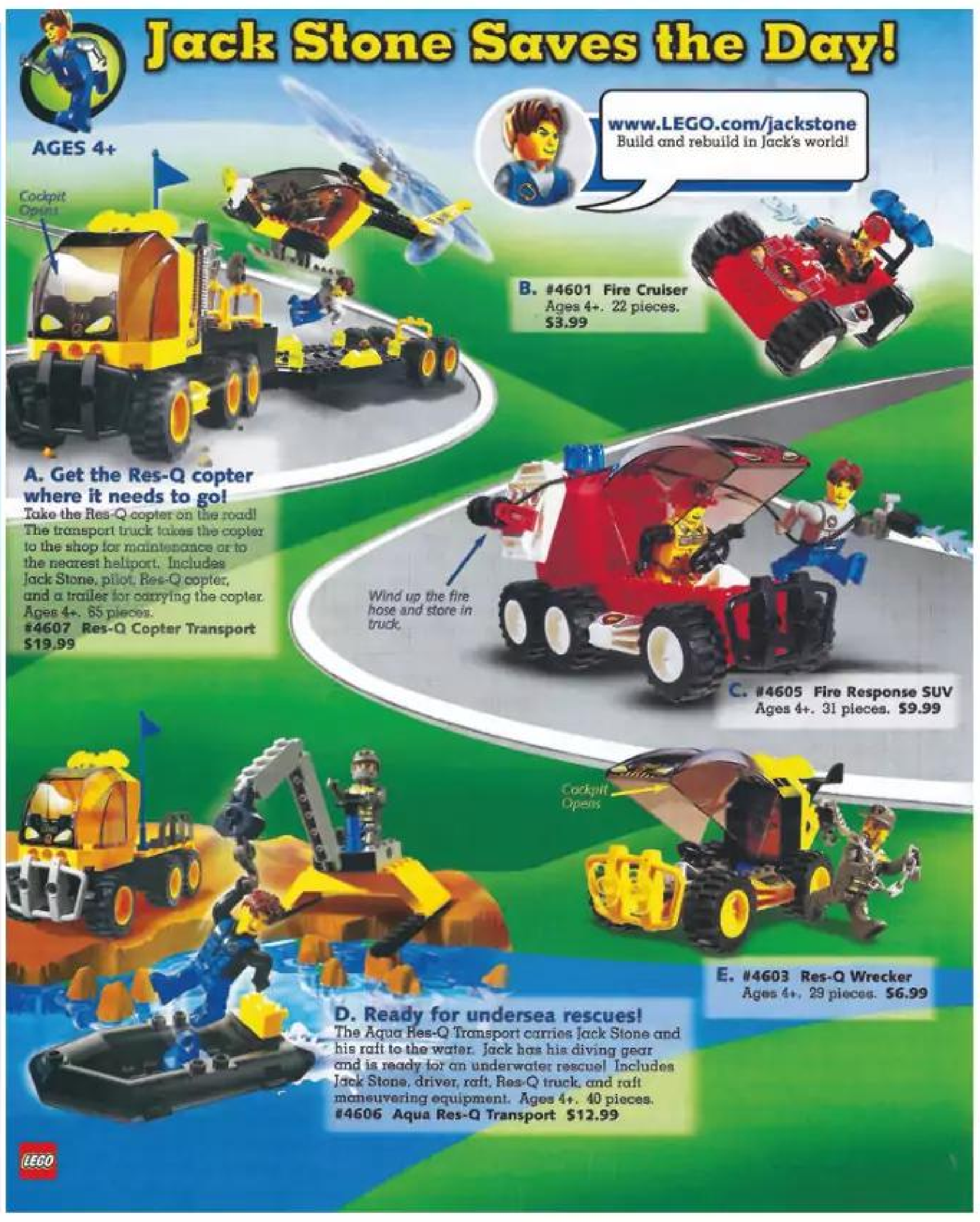
Against such sprawling franchises, analogue bricks seemed outdated and executives were becoming more and more convinced that the LEGO Group's strategy of offering building elements, original stories and imaginative play could no longer compete with the alternatives available.

Perhaps the brick was just another chapter in the company's history like the wooden toys of old, destined to be left behind for something new. From this thinking, Project Genesis was born.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM

The brief called for developing an 'organic' building experience – an umbrella term for





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A. Get the Res-Q copter where it needs to go!
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Cockpit Opens

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this new type of product line without bricks that would be sold in an entirely different part of the toy market. To help save the company, executives wanted to pivot into the action figure space with buildable characters.

The strategy would provide the LEGO Group a point of entry into a lucrative market in which they currently had no meaningful presence. It would also provide a dramatically simpler building experience, while still preserving that core aspect of the company's ethos.

From that first brief in late 1998 or early 1999 the concept quickly ballooned into something much bigger than buildable action figures. What began as one stream split into two… then three… then many.

Concept sketches were a quick and inexpensive way to flesh out a lot of ideas quickly. Using those images, the design team conducted focus groups. While this is now a standard first step in the LEGO Group's creation process, at the time it was relatively new.

The concept art was shown to children to gauge their interest. Feedback from those sessions helped the team to focus on the ideas that worked and drop the ones that didn't. That filtering effect allowed them to take only the best ideas to the next step, which led to physical prototypes. These items were then also shown to focus groups and the results quickly proved promising, with one idea rising to the top over and over.

Children loved the idea of figures with swappable body parts. One participant was quoted as saying: "I will change the heads and place the arms elsewhere." Up to that point the initiative had not had an official title, but that type of feedback is where the name Project Genesis came from.

As in the creation story, children would be making their own organic beings. The project name also inspired a possible name for the first line of products – Beings. More significantly though, the focus groups led to a question; what if these beings could be brought to life?

TOYS TO LIFE

Executives looked around and saw franchises, video game tie-ins and multimedia properties. What if Project Genesis could be that for the LEGO Group? By early 2000, it had grown to include six interrelated streams and they were all pursued simultaneously.

There were the physical toys. These would be an entirely new construction system with three categories of parts, including animal, human and robot. None of them would feature studs or tubes, rather they would utilise a new type of connector known as the friction rotation joint.

Major body parts like torsos would have ports into which children could insert pinned appendages, such as arms, legs and heads. A flying alien could have a robot's face and a human's legs amongst countless other combinations. Children responded with enthusiasm to this 'rearrangeable action figure' concept in play tests, which led to growing confidence within the LEGO Group that the toys would be successful.

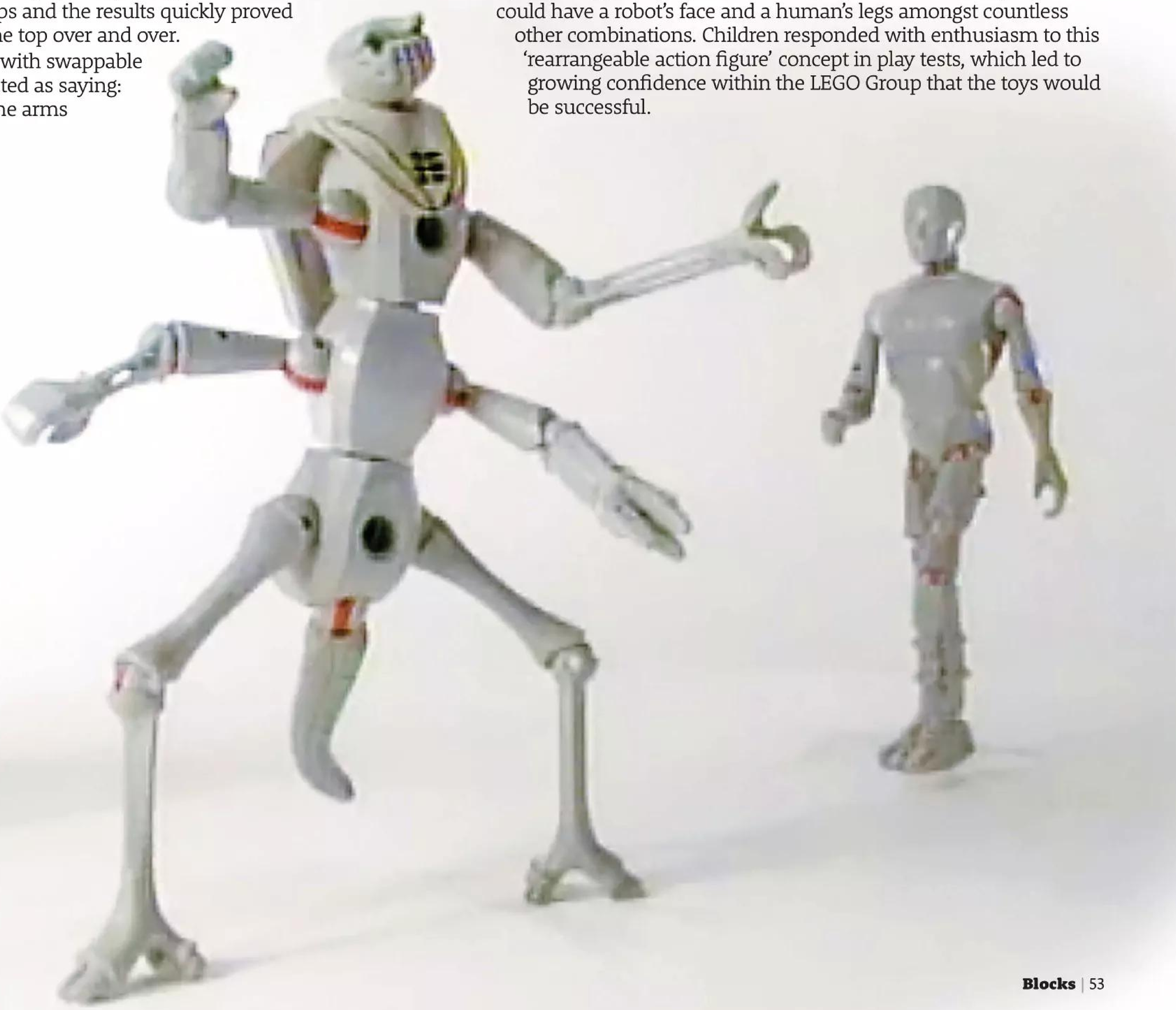
Top left: *A logo for Project Genesis.*

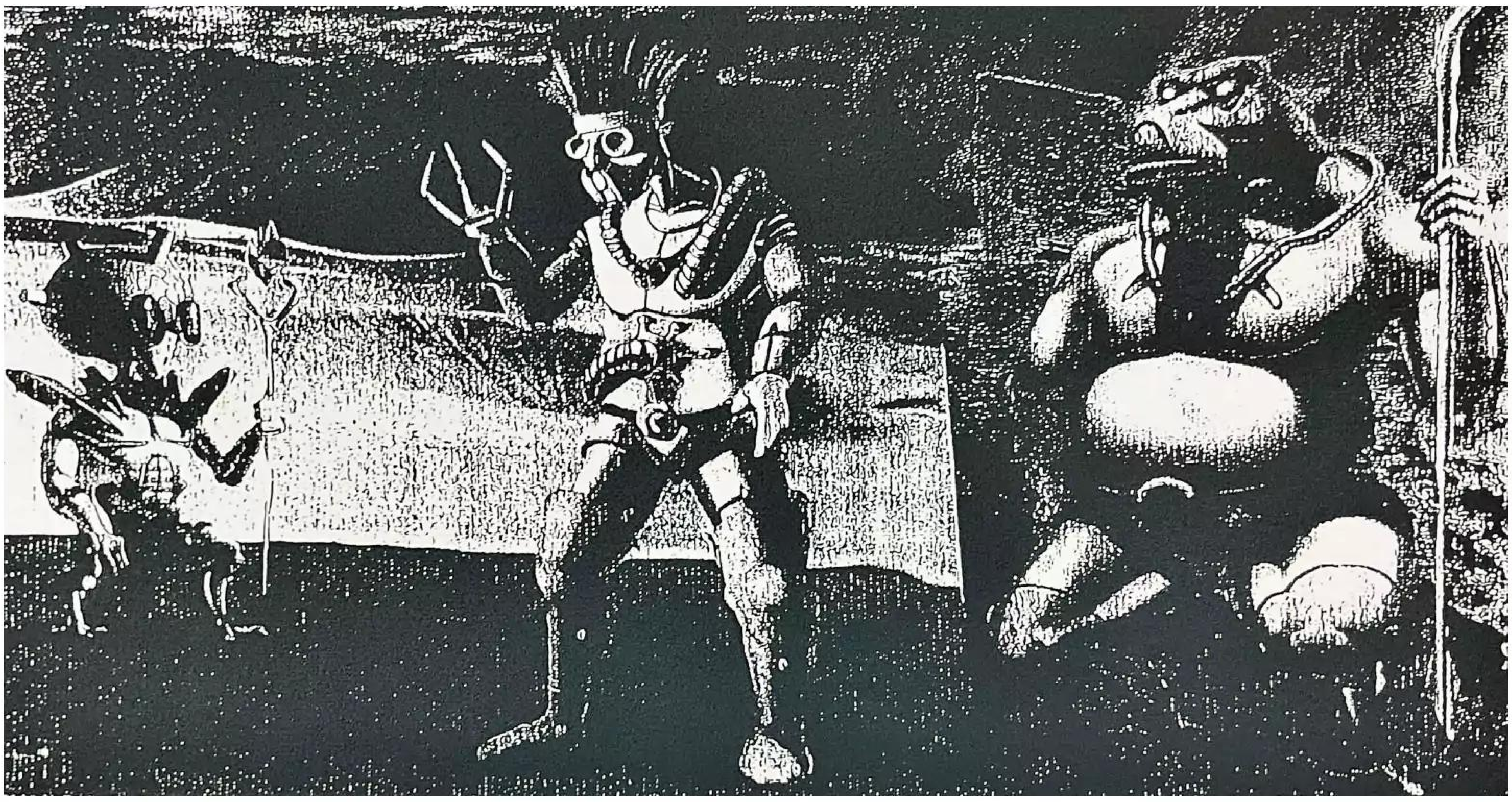
Left: *Project Genesis aimed to create a system of parts so children could make their own action figures.*

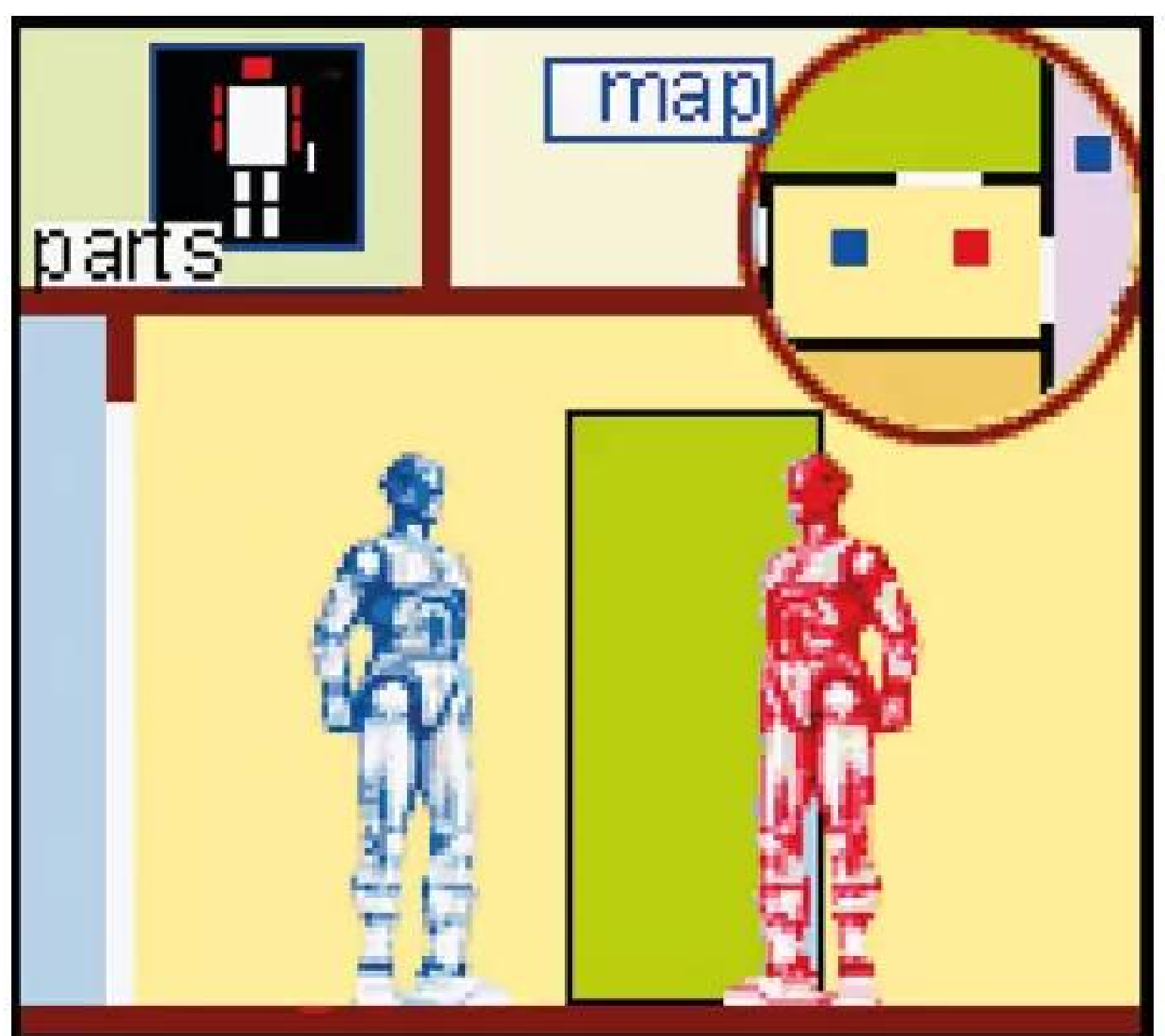
Above: *LEGO sets were simplified in the late 1990s as a belief spread within the company that children no longer wanted to build.*

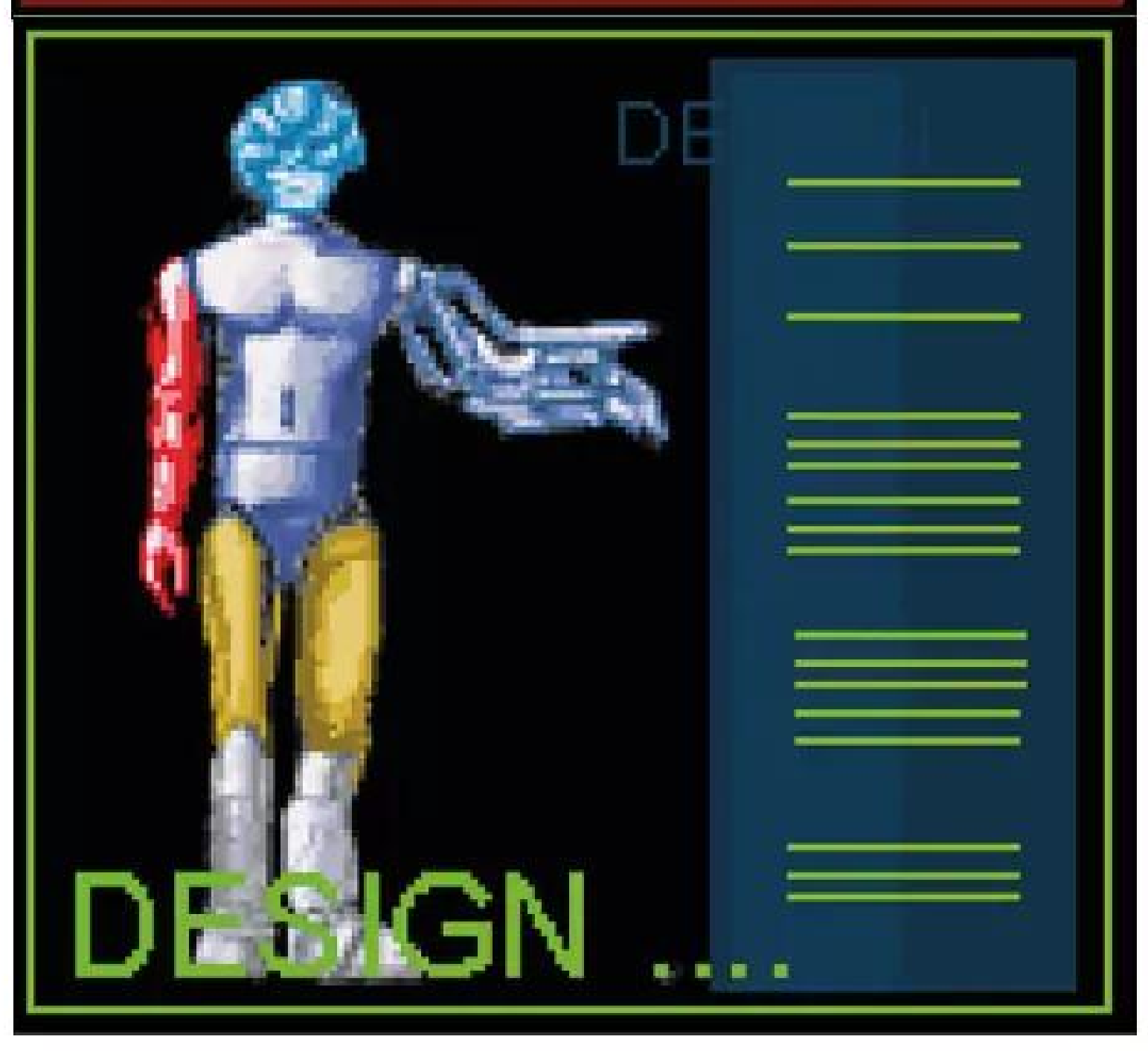
Above right: *Jack Stone was another attempt to simplify the building experience and make LEGO products more like action figures.*

Right: *Early prototypes for Project Genesis figures – the neck element would have housed the speaker.*









The second stream involved layering technology onto the action figures. After some exploration, the Genesis team envisioned a 'smart element' that would connect with the various Beings head components. It would be a neck or necklace element and would recognise the head that had been inserted into it – then it would speak in a voice associated with that head.

Stream three aimed to allow Beings to interact with the world around them – and not just by talking but taking in inputs and then responding. The LEGO Group wanted nothing short of full integration between digital and physical playscapes.

The aim was to accomplish that through a technology called intrasonics, which means 'between sounds'. A subset of acoustics, intrasonics hides sounds that are not perceptible to the human ear amidst standard audio recordings. Sensors within Beings elements would detect these hidden sounds, which would be inputs that would trigger certain types of responses. It was dubbed the Acoustical Communication System (ACS).

In addition to communicating hidden prompts, ACS would also transmit new programming to products, sending a signal to the toy that a new package is incoming and then transmitting further messages as new code. Essentially it would have allowed the elements to download information without needing a computer or a wire.

Such a play experience could continually evolve, with new features and functions added through these audio signals. Designers were so enamoured with this functionality and the seemingly endless possibilities it would facilitate that they dubbed it a 'big bang'. This was the origin of that term that subsequent design teams would chase in pursuit of a 'big bang theme'.

MULTIMEDIA

Where would those audio signals come from? One of the main ideas dovetailed perfectly into stream four – video games. Project Genesis would include tie-in games in which players constructed Beings characters and sent them on missions.

At least two concepts were explored during 1999, dubbed Genesis: Beserker and Genesis: Countdown. The gameplay was planned to involve constructing beings called Genesines – organic robots that mixed animal, human and robot parts as in the toy line. Mixing those different elements would endow a given Gensine with a unique set of capabilities that may or may not work well within a mission's parameters. The intention was that players would cycle through building different Beings to try and successfully complete the mission or increase their score by succeeding at additional objectives.

Beserker would have involved trying to stop a rogue Gensine from rampaging through the high-rise headquarters of Genesis Corps, while Countdown was to involve rescuing the victims of a crashed starship before the star drive engine exploded.

ACS would have been used to lace these games with prompts for the Beings toys so that the physical models responded to what was happening on the PC, Gameboy or PlayStation. Those would not be the only source of ACS prompts however, and the next one would perhaps be the most ambitious of all.

By the turn of the millennium, the LEGO Group had been delving into video games for a couple of years, so Beserker and Countdown would not have been completely new territory. Project Genesis' fifth stream, however, was entirely uncharted waters (aside from the late 1980s classic Edward & Friends) – a television show.

This was considered the linchpin for the whole project. Like a host of competing toy lines such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers and Transformers, an expansive world and story shown on the small screen could tie everything together. A show would introduce the toys and characters, keep the notoriously fickle attention of children and provide a perfect medium for all of those ACS signals.

The entire concept would go wherever the show went. It was so important that the LEGO Group decided to fund it and established a new subsidiary – LEGO Media International. Tom Lynch, a veteran of the TV world who had a string of successful shows aimed at the eight- to fourteen-year-old demographic on channels such as Nickelodeon, Discovery Kids and Disney Channel, was hired to develop a story and world.

Sometime in the first half of 2000, Tom and his production company started brainstorming with almost complete creative freedom. They were made aware of Beings and its central concept of interchangeable body parts. They were given a directive to work that in, but otherwise Tom had almost complete license to develop an original concept.

Project Genesis' sixth and final stream was a sort of catch all for a variety of other ideas that would fill in every nook and cranny of the comprehensive, multimedia approach that the LEGO Group wanted to put into action. A special website would feature details on Beings' story and characters that

> "Executives wanted to pivot into the action figure space with buildable characters."

Acoustical
Communication
System

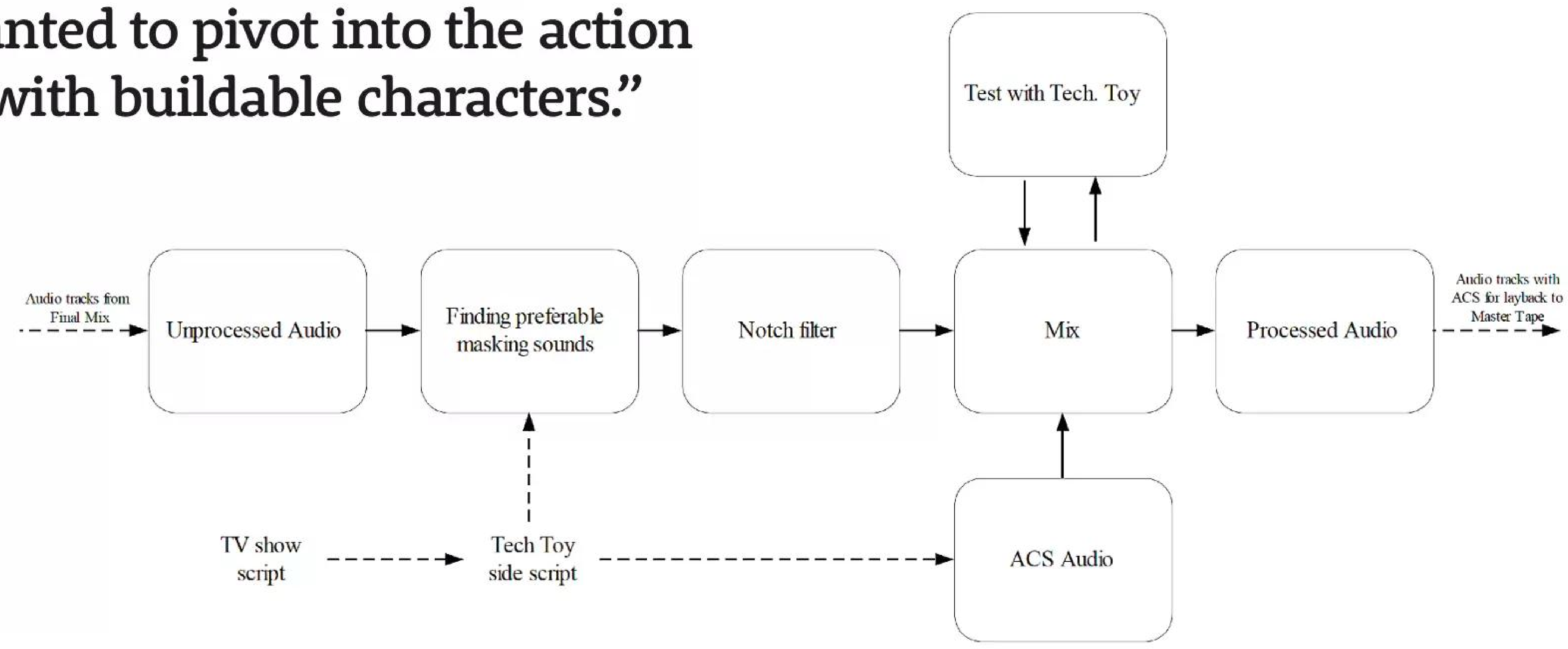
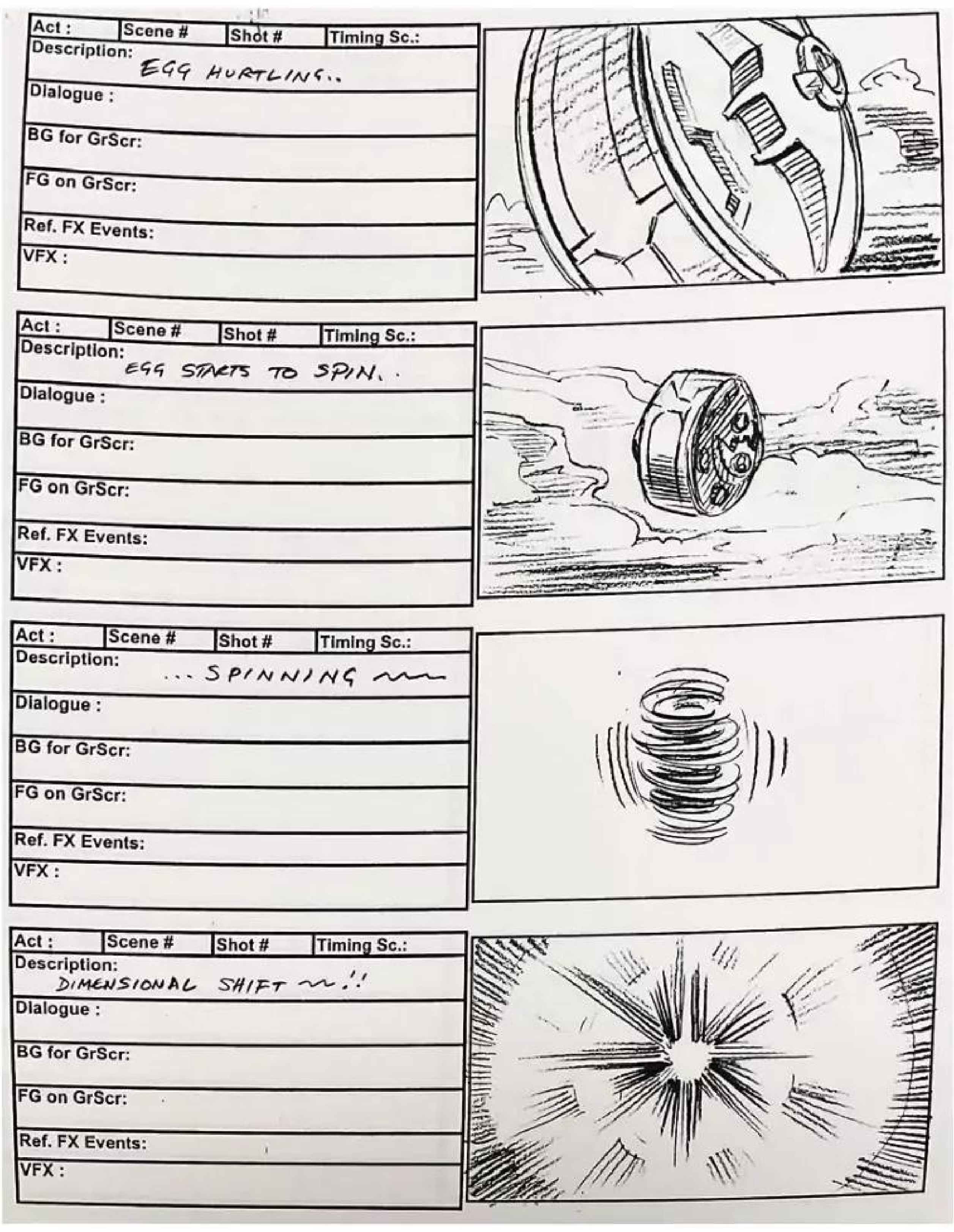


Figure 1: Overall ACS embedding block diagram.



Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: EGG HURTLING..
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: EGG STARTS TO SPIN..
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: ...SPINNING ~~
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: DIMENSIONAL SHIFT ~.!!
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Farthest left: *Early concept art for the show, which recycled designs from Beings.*

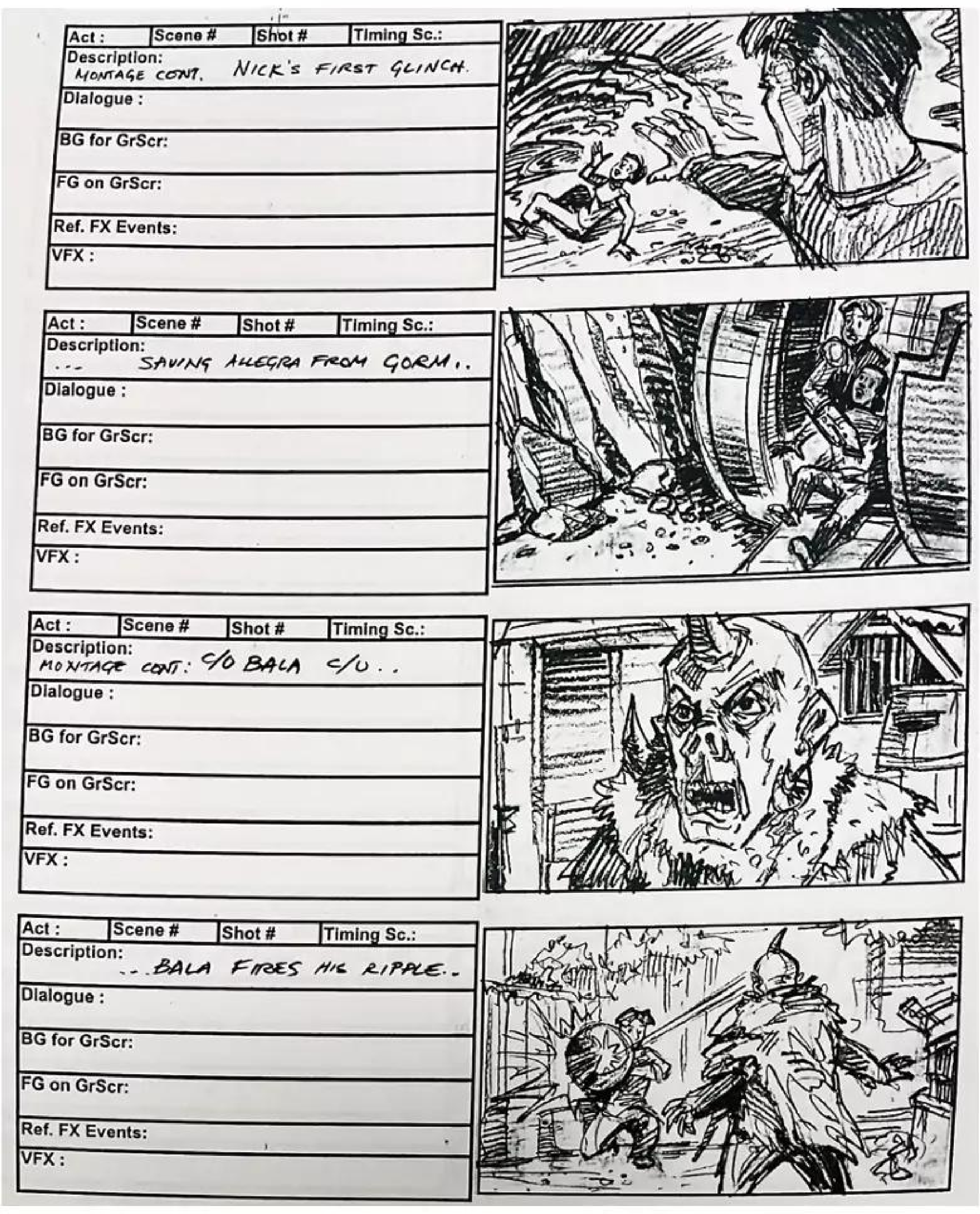
Far left: *Concept art for the Gameboy version of Genesis: Beserker showing the various body parts that could be mixed and matched.*

Left: *A potential storyboard for the series that shows the transport spinning like the tornado in The Wizard of Oz, which inspired Tom Lynch.*

Right: *A storyboard showing another potential design for an interdimensional being.*

Bottom left: *A flowchart showing how the ACS functioned.*

Bottom right: *Concept art for Genesis: Countdown showing a Genesine.*



Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: MONTAGE CONT. NICK'S FIRST GLINCH.
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: ... SAVING ALLEGRA FROM GORM..
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: MONTAGE CONT: C/O BALA C/U..
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: ...BALA FIRES HIS RIPPLE..
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

would also unlock new features on toys. There would be a collectible card game and special events, particularly utilising LEGOLAND parks.

There was also a vision to use the technology in classrooms, such as teaching tools that children would hold that would interact with a video presentation being shown by the teacher. The number of potential markets Project Genesis could penetrate seemed limitless.

AN EXCITING FUTURE

Each stream's ideas and products would cross pollinate with one another to create an immersive, all-encompassing fantasy world. Taken together, they represented a seismic and fundamental shift for the company. If it worked, Project Genesis would be an escape hatch for the LEGO Group, allowing it to leave the brick behind as a chapter in the company's story and pivot to a technologically advanced set of products that still involved building, but without studs and tubes.

A Project Genesis video presented to management in 2000 summed up what the vision for this bold initiative had become: "Genesis is a building set, a television show, a computer game, an internet community, a special event, a comic book, a card game, an educational tool, a LEGOLAND event and a geography lesson."

The thinking was that if Project Genesis worked, it would completely transform the LEGO Group and allow it to survive in the 21st century, which was clearly going to be dominated by technology-driven play experiences. This foundation of technology and a new building system could then be used across multiple new product lines, some of which hadn't even been conceived of yet, similar to the way that Technic grew out of the original LEGO System organically.

As 2000 drew to a close, this bold new initiative seemed poised to successfully deliver on all of its promises. Tom Lynch was collaborating with the product design team on an exciting idea that he had provided a treatment for in August. The ACS technology had successfully delivered its first Protocol Specification Document. Most importantly, children were responding enthusiastically to the toy prototypes and their technology driven aspects in play tests.

The LEGO Group had posted its first loss in decades and had been in choppy financial waters since. Toy sales were slowing and licensed products were helping, but hadn't been a magic bullet solution. The company needed a saviour and that is why such a huge financial commitment was being made at a time when the LEGO Group could barely afford it.

THE WIZARD OF OZ

Tom Lynch was a veteran of the small screen and had been hired by the LEGO Group's new subsidiary, LEGO Media International, to develop a television show for Project Genesis. This would create an engrossing, all-encompassing experience where there was no clear delineation between where one aspect of the franchise ended and another began. The new show was seen as the key to the success of the entire enterprise.

Leading up to an August 2000 presentation of his idea to the LEGO Group as a formal show treatment, Tom spent time with the design team to understand the toy line they had been developing under the working name Beings. Children had already approved their central play feature – each action figure would be made up of interchangeable body parts. Arms, legs, heads and torsos could all be mixed and matched to create new characters. Incorporating that functionality into his story was one of Tom's few creative mandates.

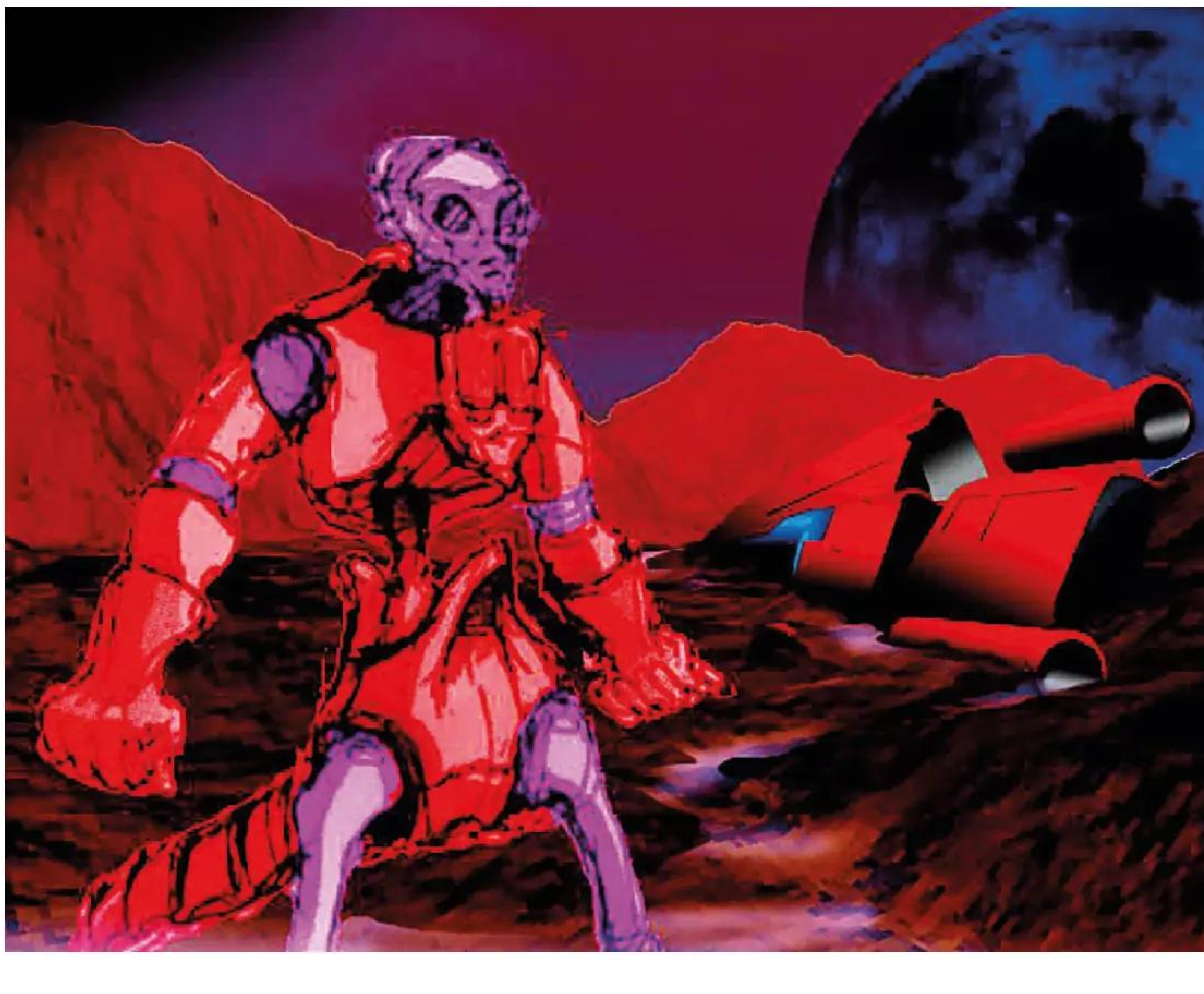
Based on that directive, it was clear that the show needed a narrative explanation for why the characters could switch body parts. That led Tom to decide that the story wouldn't take place on Earth, but in another dimension where the normal rules of this universe would not apply. He dubbed his new world The Outer Dimension.

More thoughts and inspiration quickly followed. The show's dual heroes would travel from their home on earth to this new realm. Once there, they would go on an adventure with strange and fantastical helpers inspired by the alien, human and robot body parts from the Beings line.

It didn't take long for Tom to begin seeing parallels with The Wizard of Oz, which became an analogy and inspiration for characters. His hero, dubbed Chistian Bluetooth (whose first name was eventually changed to Nick), was based on Dorothy – who left her world, travelled to Oz and then needed to find a way to get back home. Christian/Nick would be joined by his best friend, who apparently mapped onto Toto, a girl named Allegra Zane.

Figuring out how to get back to Earth, just like Dorthy with Kansas, would the help of friends the heroes would meet in the Outer Dimension. Tom decided there would be a trio of companions. Jens would be the equivalent of the Tin Man, an industrious and methodical silver clad robot lacking the empathy that comes from a heart. Ogel, whose name was later changed to Euripides, would channel the Scarecrow's focus on brains as the group's analytical and philosophical member.

Finally, there would be the Cowardly Lion's equivalent, Nepol. Here the analogy broke down a bit, as Tom wanted him to be a tough and in-your face-warrior, though his hairy design would provide some vague physical resemblance. These five were planned out as the show's central cast of characters.



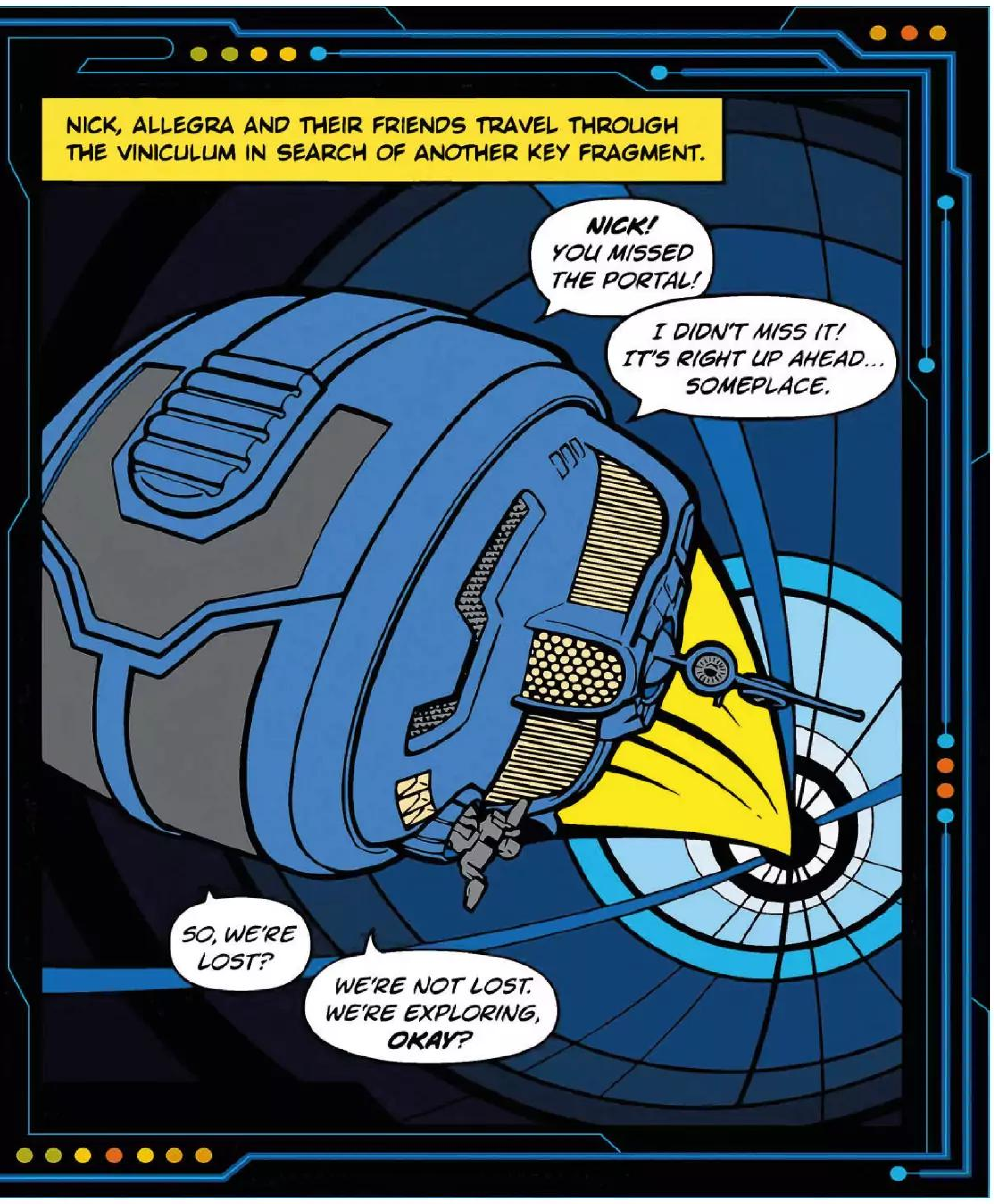
> "It was clear that the show needed a narrative explanation for why the characters could switch body parts."

Inspiration from The Wizard of Oz did not stop there. All good stories need a villain and the Wicked Witch of the West is one of cinema's most iconic. The Outer Dimension would be plagued by Gorm, a being of immense power who would desire something Christian/Nick possessed, similar to the Witch wanting Dorthy's ruby slippers.

If the Outer Dimension was Oz, what would be that realm's Emerald City? A kingdom known as Galidon, eventually switched to a name that is now infamous – Galidor. This other dimensional kingdom would be ruled over by its own Glinda the Good Witch of the North – Riana, who in later treatments became Christian's mother, making him the product of two worlds. Finally, as in The Wizard of Oz, Nick would be able to return home after completing the quest to defeat Gorm.

THE OUTER DIMENSION

Drawing on this inspiration, Tom assembled a story treatment that outlined a pilot episode with the main story beats, titled "The Outer Dimension". Galidor wasn't chosen as the name of the show until later. That script introduced several key aspects of the story, first and foremost the mechanic that incorporated the interchangeable body parts from the Beings toys.


NICK, ALLEGRA AND THEIR FRIENDS TRAVEL THROUGH THE VINICULUM IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER KEY FRAGMENT.
NICK! YOU MISSED THE PORTAL!
I DIDN'T MISS IT! IT'S RIGHT UP AHEAD... SOMEPLACE.
SO, WE'RE LOST?
WE'RE NOT LOST. WE'RE EXPLORING, OKAY?

Residents of the Outer Dimension would have the ability to swap body parts, both organic and mechanical. Since it would later be revealed that Christian/Nick is the product of a human father and otherworldly mother, being in Galidor would give him the same ability. At first, he wouldn't be able to control it (similar to the way that Dorthy doesn't know how to use the power of her ruby slippers), and mastering it would be central to his arc over the show's first season.

These transformative powers would eventually be named 'Glinching'. Another key aspect of the pilot was an interdimensional vehicle, called The Egg or TDN Module, which would serve as the show's tornado/ruby slippers to transport Nick and Allegra back and forth between worlds.

Along with the narrative for the show's first episode, Tom's treatment also included several additional sections; an outline for 12 further episodes with brief descriptions and plot beats, concept art, much of which was drawn from the LEGO Group's work on Beings, showing early concepts for all five of the main characters as well as the TDN Module. Technical details were also included, describing how different visuals and characters could be executed using a mix of costumes, motion capture and CGI.

Finally, in keeping with the vision for Project Genesis' multiple streams, the last page of the treatment described an internet component for the show. This would consist of a website for The Outer Dimension, which would have pages dedicated to the various aspects of the show.

As a reminder of when this document was written and how out of touch some of the people reading it would have been, the opening of this section included a description of what the internet is and how it works, ending with the sentence: "You can bring all that Earth has to offer to your computer."

TDN MODULE

When Nick Bluetooth stumbles upon a mysterious egg-shaped craft capable of dimensional travel, his greatest adventure begins. With the TDN (TransDimensional Navigation) Module, He discovers an amazing Outer Dimension, filled with action, danger, incredible new allies and a powerful foe.

Figure not included.
GALIDOR
LEGO
Items shown are subject to change.

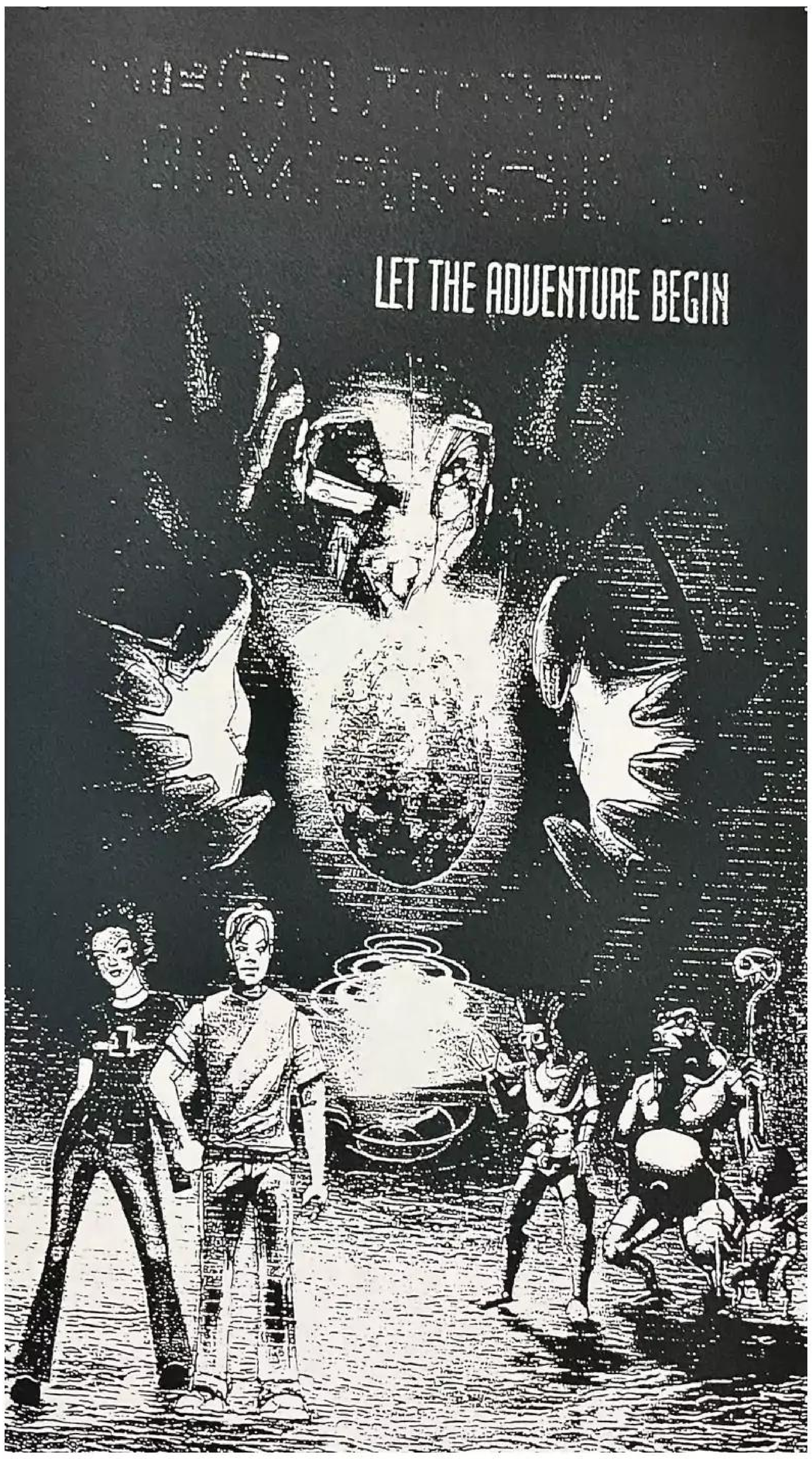
Dated references aside, the plan for the website matched the grand scope of Project Genesis. It would include a full history of The Outer Dimension's creation, including an explanation of where Glinching came from – it was spawned through an evolutionary hiccup where time moved in a circular rather than linear manner.

As this was intended to be a multi season show, a variety of worlds, not just Galidor, would populate the universe. There was a plan for each planet was to have its own page for users to explore. Another section would have been devoted to characters, their ability to exchange parts, with a feature for children to build their own digital character. There would also have been back stories for all of the major characters, most notably Christian/Nick whose page would have included a full family tree and details on the prophecy that foretold him.

Visitors to the website would be able to view Christian/Nick's home to "see what his parents are up to while he's away," which would presumably have been frantically calling the police and spending sleepless, tear-filled nights wondering where their little boy had been abducted to. Finally, in a move bolder than asking children to spy on distraught parents, visitors to the website would have been able to submit story ideas to the writers.

Tom's August 2000 treatment delighted the right people in Billund. Executives immediately signed off on his vision and a show based on The Outer Dimension document was greenlit. Product designers were told to immediately halt work on Beings and switch over to The Outer Dimension, which had evolved into its own concept.

They were to reuse or adapt existing concepts where possible, but otherwise the instruction was to create new designs specifically for the show. On the video game front, Beserker and Countdown were scrapped in favour of a game tied to Tom's concept. Likewise, ACS work shifted towards preparing signals that could be hidden amongst the scripts and scores which Tom and his team started developing. The LEGO Group was going all-in on The Outer Dimension and the full might of Project Genesis was put behind it. This would be the first product from this grand vision, with the intent for many more to follow.



Left: A poster concept that Tom Lynch showed to LEGO executives.

Far left: Nick's arm jets were originally designed for Beings.

Bottom left: A page from the comic book included with McDonalds Happy Meals.

Below left: The egg's final design as 8315 TDN Module.

Below: The world of the Outer Dimension would be depicted in the show and in video games.

> **"If Project Genesis worked, it would completely transform the LEGO Group."**

GALIDOR

Project Genesis was an incredibly ambitious undertaking. Attempting to simultaneously create a multimedia property from scratch that seamlessly blends a TV show, video games, physical toys, ambitious new audio technology, live shows, events and more was an aggressive approach. Over the course of 2001, it all took shape.

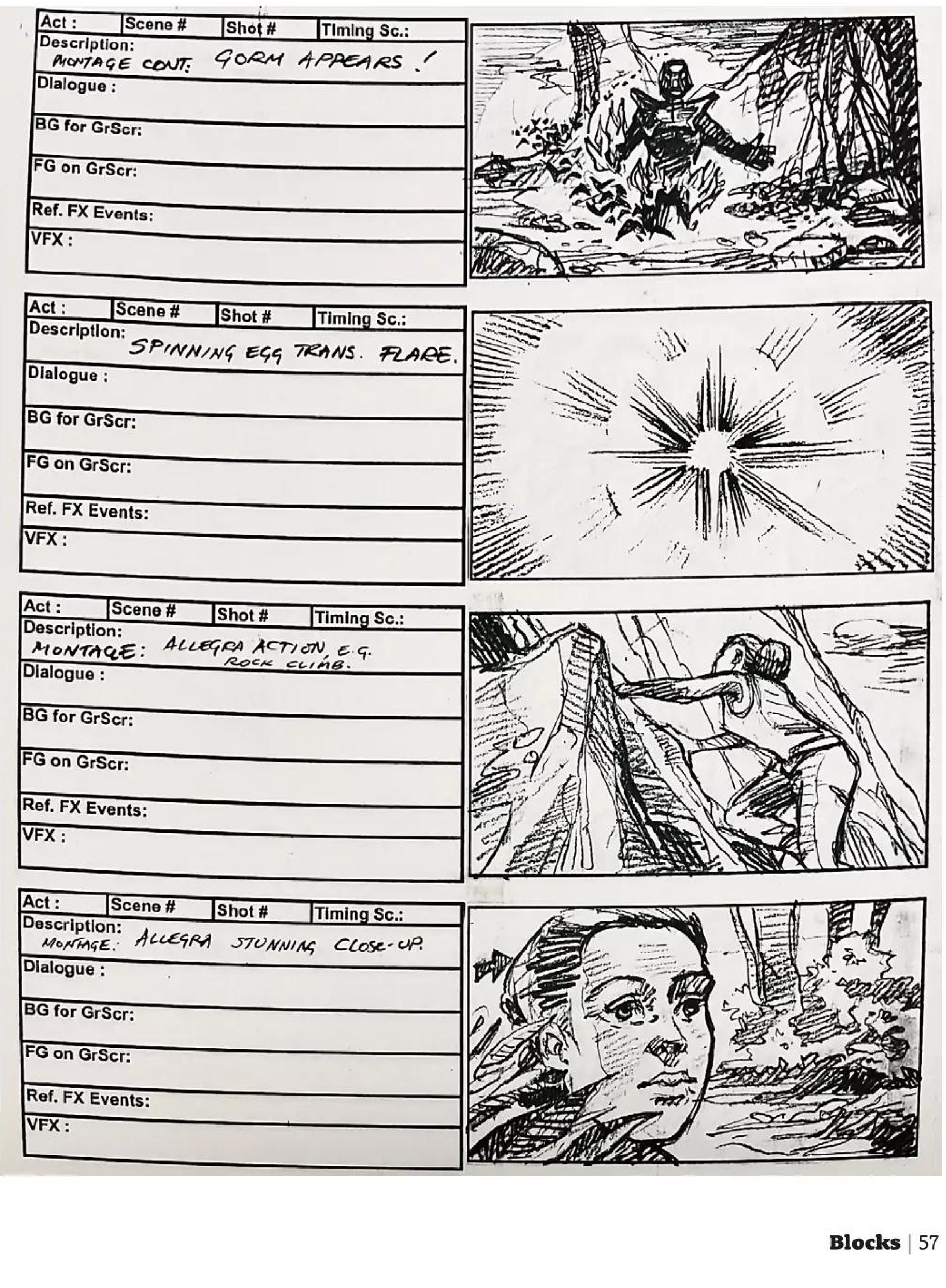
Tom was able to successfully negotiate with the popular Fox Family Channel, the same place where children watched Power Rangers, to broadcast Galidor. The show would begin production of its first two seasons in September 2001. On the game front, development started on Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension under Tiertrex Studios, targeting a release for both Gameboy and PC in 2002.

As for the toys, LEGO designers worked hand in hand with the showrunners to develop the final look of the characters that would appear both in show and in the toy line. Tom gave a new presentation in March 2002 that included many pages of 3D models that showcased a huge volume of work over the previous six months. The toy launch was planned for July 1. As part of that initial line, ACS technology would be incorporated into 8316 Kek Powerizer. Exactly as envisioned, it would listen for the hidden audio signals that were incorporated into Galidor video games and shows.

A new Imagination Zone was designed for LEGOLAND titled The Quest for Galidor. Visitors would be able to take pictures in front of a green screen, then use effects to make themselves Glinch with different body parts. A dedicated website was also developed, including a Flash game from Templar studios called Galidor Glincher, which would allow visitors to mix and match 3D models of various Galidor body parts to make their own creatures, exactly as was envisioned for Beings.

Everything was set for a big, splashy launch in 2002. Then came a gamechanger – a promotional deal with McDonalds so that Galidor toys would be included with Happy Meals. More than a decade earlier, a similar promotion with small polybag sets had helped introduce LEGO toys to the US market, resulting in an enormous rise in awareness and long-lasting financial success. Now, as the company turned from the brick to a new concept, history seemed poised to repeat itself.

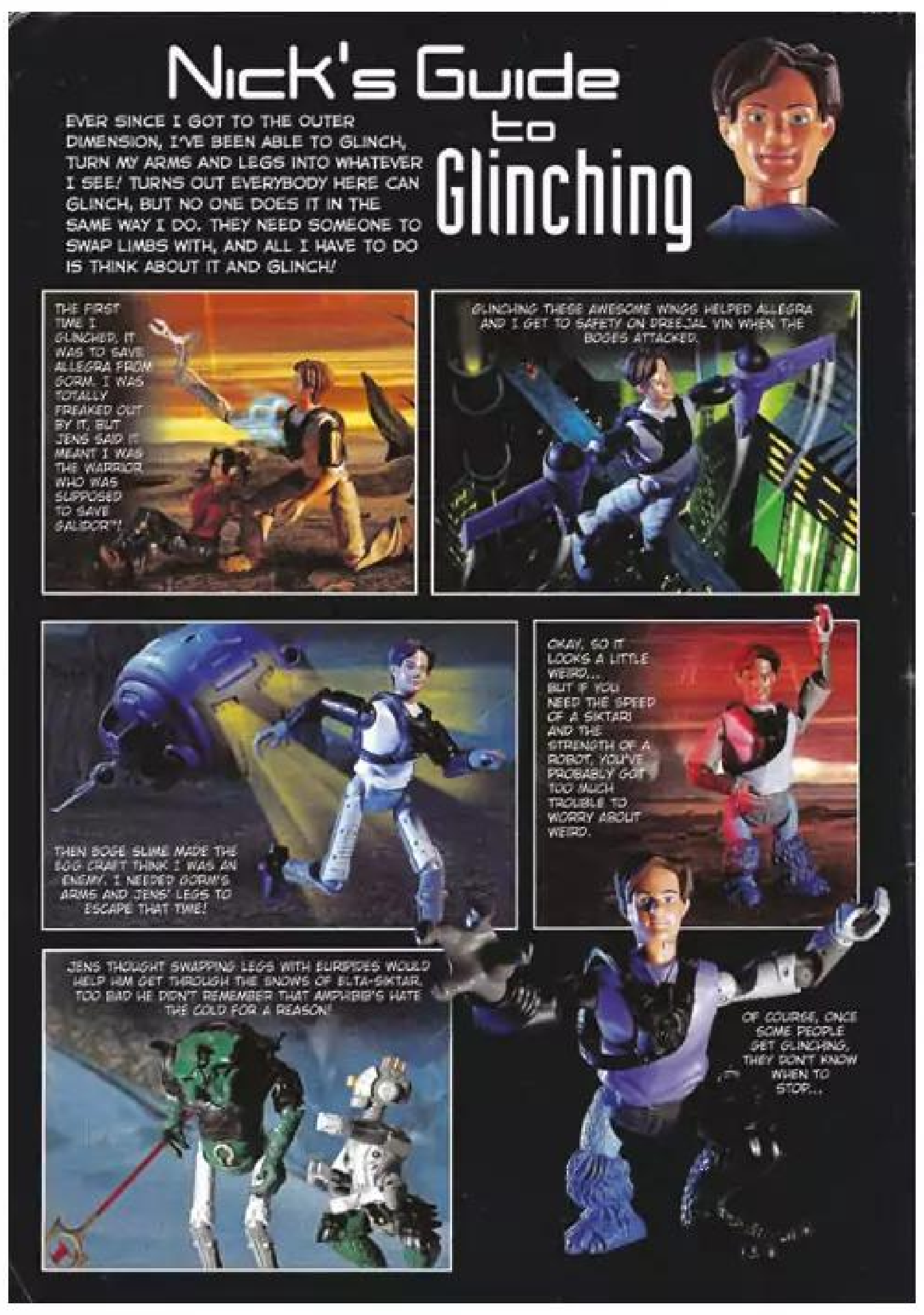
The buoyant mood in Billund was summed up in the LEGO Group's own internal magazine, which gushed about Galidor's introduction during a high profile event at New York Toy Fair: "Media representatives drooled over the action figures and the first episode of the TV series … Glinching will soon become a new cult concept among children and the young at heart." Success seemed inevitable.

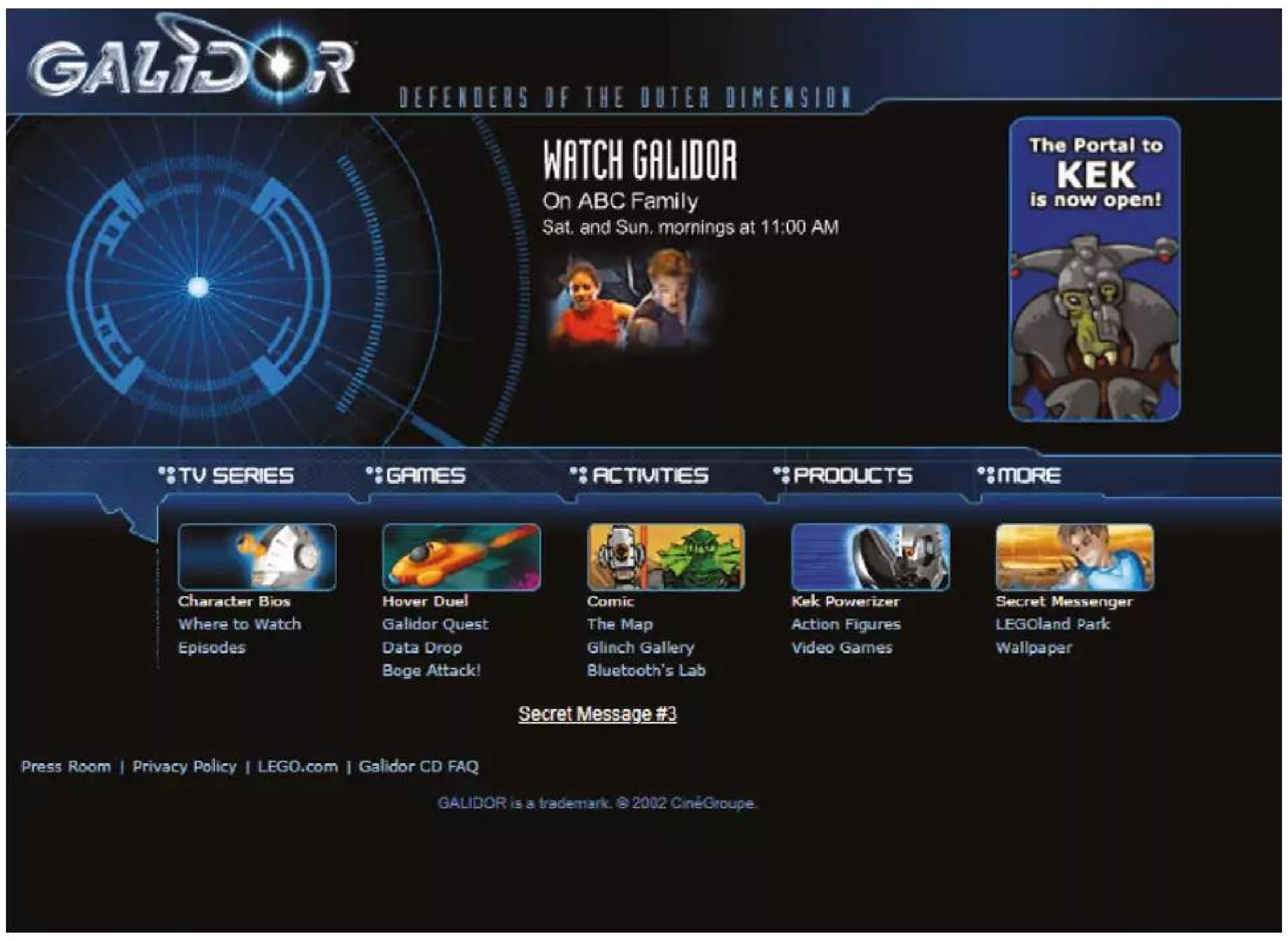

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: MONTAGE CONT: GORM APPEARS !
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: SPINNING EGG TRANS. FLARE.
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: MONTAGE: ALLEGRA ACTION, E.G. ROCK CLIMB.
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :

Act : Scene # Shot # Timing Sc.:
Description: MONTAGE. ALLEGRA STUNNING CLOSE-UP.
Dialogue :
BG for GrScr:
FG on GrScr:
Ref. FX Events:
VFX :


Nick's Guide to Glinching
EVER SINCE I GOT TO THE OUTER DIMENSION, I'VE BEEN ABLE TO GLINCH, TURN MY ARMS AND LEGS INTO WHATEVER I SEE! TURNS OUT EVERYBODY HERE CAN GLINCH, BUT NO ONE DOES IT IN THE SAME WAY I DO. THEY NEED SOMEONE TO SWAP LIMBS WITH, AND ALL I HAVE TO DO IS THINK ABOUT IT AND GLINCH!
THE FIRST TIME I GLINCHED, IT WAS TO SAVE ALLEGRA FROM GORM. I WAS TOTALLY FREAKED OUT BY IT, BUT JENS SAID IT MEANT I WAS THE WARRIOR WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO SAVE GALIDOR?!
GLINCHING THESE AWESOME WINGS HELPED ALLEGRA AND I GET TO SAFETY ON DREEJAL VIN WHEN THE BOGES ATTACKED.
THEN BOGE SLIME MADE THE EGG CRAFT THINK I WAS AN ENEMY. I NEEDED GORM'S ARMS AND JENS' LEGS TO ESCAPE THAT TIME!
OKAY, SO IT LOOKS A LITTLE WEIRD... BUT IF YOU NEED THE SPEED OF A SIKTARI AND THE STRENGTH OF A ROBOT, YOU'VE PROBABLY GOT TOO MUCH TROUBLE TO WORRY ABOUT WEIRD.
JENS THOUGHT SWAPPING LEGS WITH EURIPIDES WOULD HELP HIM GET THROUGH THE SNOWS OF ELTA-SIKTAR. TOO BAD HE DIDN'T REMEMBER THAT AMPHIBB'S HATE THE COLD FOR A REASON!
OF COURSE, ONCE SOME PEOPLE GET GLINCHING, THEY DON'T KNOW WHEN TO STOP...


GALIDOR
DEFENDERS OF THE OUTER DIMENSION
TV SERIES
GAMES
ACTIVITIES
PRODUCTS
MORE
Character Bios
Where to Watch
Episodes
Hover Duel
Galidor Quest
Data Drop
Boge Attack!
Comic
The Map
Glinch Gallery
Bluetooth's Lab
Kek Powerizer
Action Figures
Video Games
Secret Messenger
LEGOland Park
Wallpaper
Secret Message #3
Press Room | Privacy Policy | LEGO.com | Galidor CD FAQ

WATCH GALIDOR
On ABC Family
Sat. and Sun. mornings at 11:00 AM

The Portal to KEK is now open!

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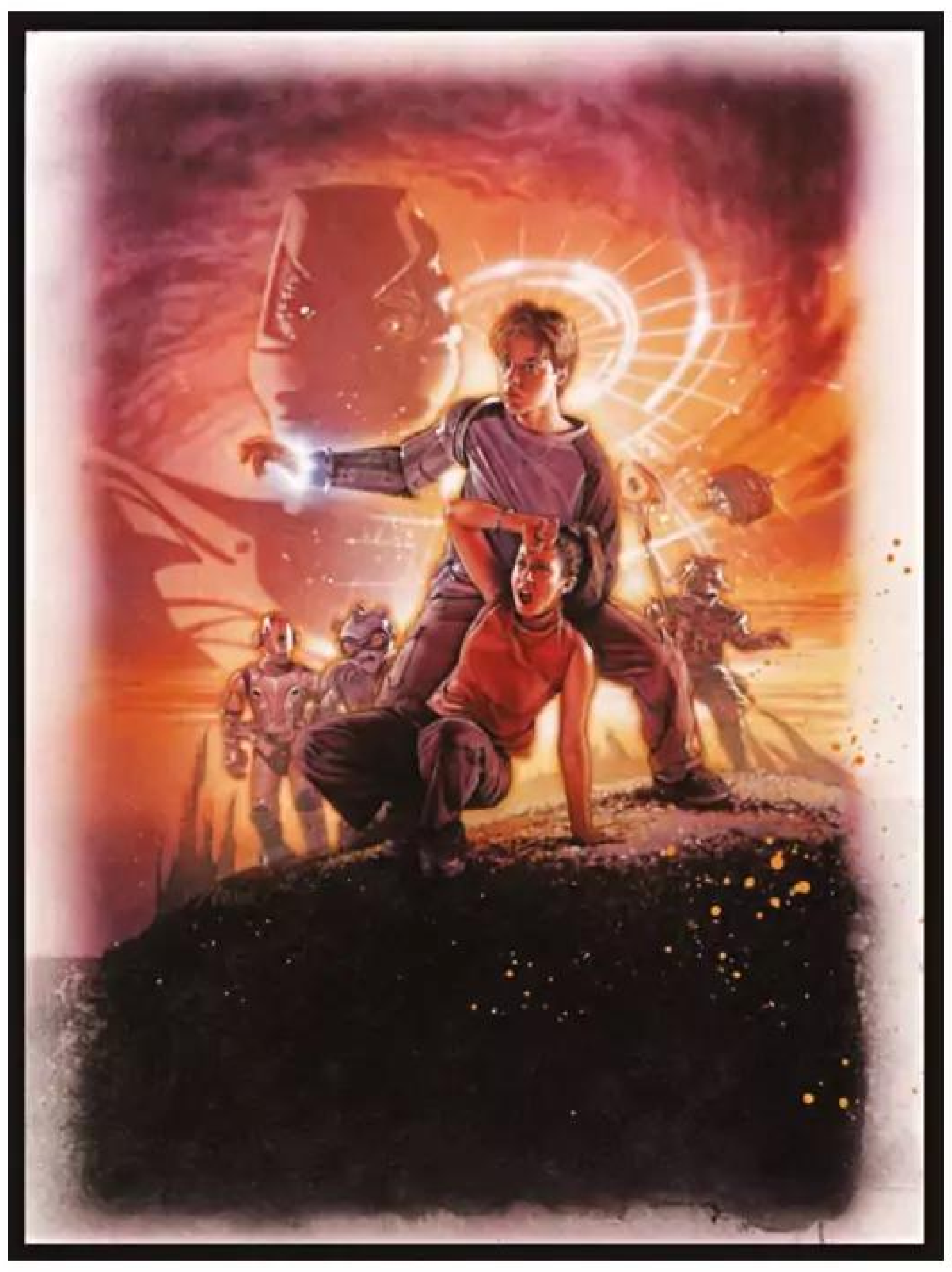


Galidor was supposed to be the first of many transformative product lines from Project Genesis. The plan was for the technology this ambitious initiative pioneered to be used in not just multiple seasons of Galidor shows and toys, but other product lines including preschool, education and everything between. The new beginning happened in September 2002, when the first episode of Galidor: Defenders of the Outer Dimension aired on TV.

Against all odds, a bevy of new tie-in products and initiatives had been successfully developed over the previous year, ahead of this television debut.

New technologies had been successfully developed and incorporated – 8316 Kek Powerizer responded to the television episodes thanks to hidden audio commands embedded within the audio. What the LEGO Group had pulled off in such a short time was impressive – a success eclipsed only by the scale and thoroughness of its utter failure. In just a few short months, Galidor – and therefore all of Project Genesis – came crashing down.

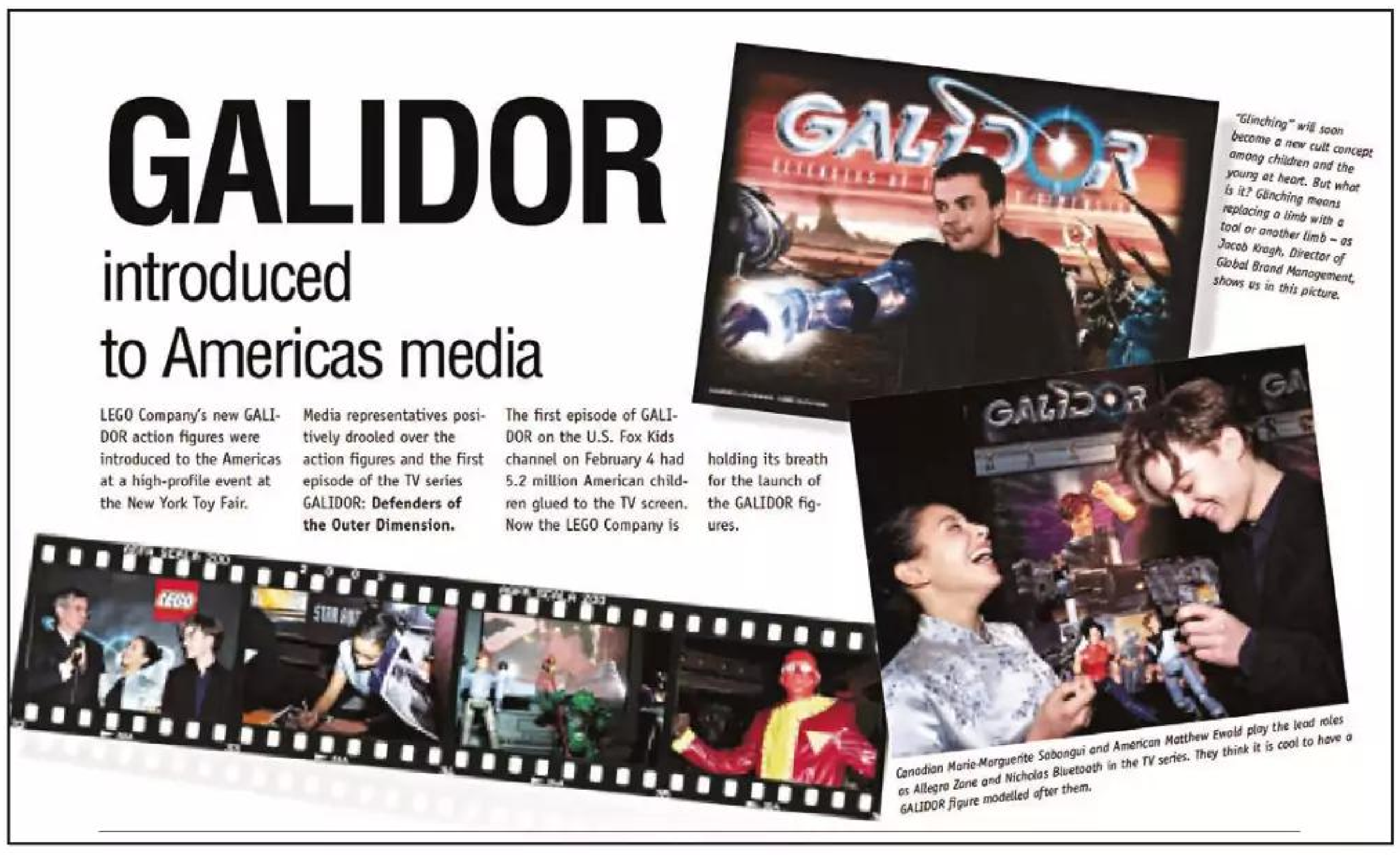
EVERYTHING GOES WRONG

The reasons for Galidor's failure have been debated at length by Hollywood, the LEGO Group and LEGO fans, who have all posited different reasons through the years. The most likely answers is 'all of the above.' Had only one or two of these headwinds troubled the project, perhaps the concept could have succeeded. Perhaps it would have been a hit that would have resulted in a LEGO world very different from that of today. Instead, everything went wrong for Galidor and Project Genesis.

The first major obstacle was completely independent of the LEGO Group, its products and even the quality of the show itself. On October 24, 2001, just a month after Galidor began shooting its first two seasons, Disney announced that it was purchasing the Family Channel from Fox, where the show was set to broadcast, for $5.2 billion dollars.

The acquisition was largely the result of arrogance and hubris on the part of executives, most notably then-CEO Michael Eisner. The House of Mouse grossly overpaid for the channel and were largely played by Haim Saban, the owner of Power Rangers, which was the channel's main draw. Disney struggled to run the channel from day one, as management changed virtually overnight with no clear vision or direction.

Amidst the chaos, nobody on the new management team had the time or desire to invest in or even pay attention to the startup TV show called Galidor. Furthermore, since ownership was shared with the LEGO Group, who had fronted much of the money for production, there was almost no incentive for Disney to try and make the show succeed. Galidor failing would essentially have zero financial impact on their bottom line.



GALIDOR
introduced to Americas media

LEGO Company's new GALIDOR action figures were introduced to the Americas at a high-profile event at the New York Toy Fair.

Media representatives positively drooled over the action figures and the first episode of the TV series GALIDOR: **Defenders of the Outer Dimension.**

The first episode of GALIDOR on the U.S. Fox Kids channel on February 4 had 5.2 million American children glued to the TV screen. Now the LEGO Company is holding its breath for the launch of the GALIDOR figures.

"Glinching" will soon become a new cult concept among children and the young at heart. But what is it? Glinching means replacing a limb with a tool or another limb – as Jacob Kragh, Director of Global Brand Management, shows us in this picture.

Canadian Marie-Marguerite Sabongui and American Matthew Ewald play the lead roles as Allegra Zane and Nicholas Bluetooth in the TV series. They think it is cool to have a GALIDOR figure modelled after them.

All of the things a new show needs to succeed – promotions, a favourable time slot – disappeared and neither the show's creator nor the LEGO Group could get anyone at Disney to care. Unsurprisingly, LEGO executives pinned much of the blame for Galidor's failure on these circumstances.

The quality of the products is another reason that is often cited for Galidor's failure. But Project Genesis and Galidor were not intended for children who loved to build. This initiative was a way for the LEGO Group to penetrate new, potentially more lucrative markets. These were not traditional construction toys but action figures, with the twist of them being buildable as arms, legs and torsos could all be interchanged. They were a pivot away from the company's base to appeal to what was theoretically a much larger pool of consumers.

To that end, the toys themselves were excellent and had impressed children in play test after play test. Contrary to common wisdom amongst LEGO fans, the toys did not fail because they were poor quality.

What made Galidor toys so cool to children was their ability to Glinch, just like in the show. As every part was transferable, children could construct their own unique creatures and action figures from all the arms, legs, torsos and heads. However, that ability was not heavily featured on the packaging or in the promotional material. Their unique attribute wasn't communicated.

Brand confusion further compounded the issue. LEGO products usually commanded their own aisle in stores. Galidor was branded as a LEGO toy with the company's logo – so should it sit alongside Adventurers and Space or sit alongside Batman and WWF? Nobody knew, which left toy stores to figure it out, with some placing them in the LEGO aisle and others placing them in the action figure aisle.

When they ended up in the LEGO aisle, children passed them by because those who looked in that area loved building and these toys

had no bricks. Yet they fared no better in the action figure aisle, because nobody there who might have been interested knew what they were. Because the show had rated so poorly, awareness was extremely limited. Nick Bluetooth was never going to be chosen over Batman on merit alone, especially as his Glinching ability was not super obvious.

Then there is the Galidor TV show itself. Niels Milan Pedersen declared that it was "not good" and recalls the design team expecting to see top quality special effects… and being incredibly disappointed.

> "Prototypes and future products that were in development were scrapped."

Tom Lynch also acknowledged some of the challenges in this arena. At the time of Galidor's release, George Lucas had been redefining expectations for special effects with the Star Wars prequels. Tom had approached ILM, the special effects company responsible for Star Wars, but the price tag for a single episode was more than the show's entire budget.

A variety of characters and scenes planned to be CGI (computer generated imagery) had to be realised practically. What had been envisioned as a sleek render became, out of necessity, a guy in a rubber suit. The dialogue was also somewhat clunky and cheesy.

It was a show aimed at children though – most criticism levelled at Galidor could easily describe Power Rangers, which was absolutely dominating the air waves at this time. Had Disney heavily promoted the show and had children fallen in love with the toys, it's entirely possible that the low-quality series could have been a ratings hit.

AFTERMATH AND LEGACY

It did not take long for the LEGO Group to realise just what a failure Galidor was. Toys backed up on shelves and in warehouses, quickly relegated by retailers to the infamous, inglorious, discount bins. The show's ratings and viewership tanked and it was pulled as soon as its initial two season run had finished airing.

Work on Galidor ceased and all future product plans were cancelled. That didn't apply just to Galidor, but to Project Genesis as a whole. Prototypes and future products that were in development were scrapped. Tom Lynch and his production company were let go, as were the various studios and creatives working on all of the other technologies associated with Genesis. The ACS technology that had always been intended for wider applications submitted its final technical documentation on June 6, 2002. By the end of 2003, all traces of Project Genesis – the ambitious, transformative initiative to remake the LEGO Group – were gone.

It is easy with the benefit of hindsight to dismiss this whole enterprise as a ridiculous gambit. However, there were very real learnings brought about by Project Genesis and Galidor that have had long lasting effects.

The central premise behind Project Genesis proved accurate – the LEGO Group could no longer only rely on imaginative, original play that was separate from technology, franchises and multimedia storytelling. All those years ago, the company had accurately diagnosed a very real problem.

Those involved with this initiative had also come up with a viable solution. The answer was for the LEGO Group to embrace storytelling and cross-pollinated product lines across a range of mediums. Big bang play experiences, tie-in television shows, video games, special events and a host of ancillary products are all part of major LEGO themes now. The difference is that when NINJAGO launched in 2011, it did so in a more modest way and built out the surrounding franchise as children responded well to it.

Galidor and Project Genesis taught the LEGO Group important lessons about diversification and not betting everything on one concept. The years immediately after Galidor flopped saw the introduction of an 'in and out' themes model. Small product lines, intended to only last a year or two, were inexpensive to produce and market in comparison with big bang launches and could provide a reliable source of income as they performed more predictably than larger swings.

Over the years these smaller themes also served as incubators to try out the various streams that Project Genesis had tried all at once. Exo-Force experimented with comics and an interactive website. Atlantis had a TV special. Power Miners had web shorts, both animated and live action. When Galidor tried all of those things at once, the LEGO Group didn't have much experience and so made a lot of elementary mistakes, such as funding the TV show themselves. Thanks to the lessons of the much smaller experiments the company was able to gain expertise and do things right when it mattered.

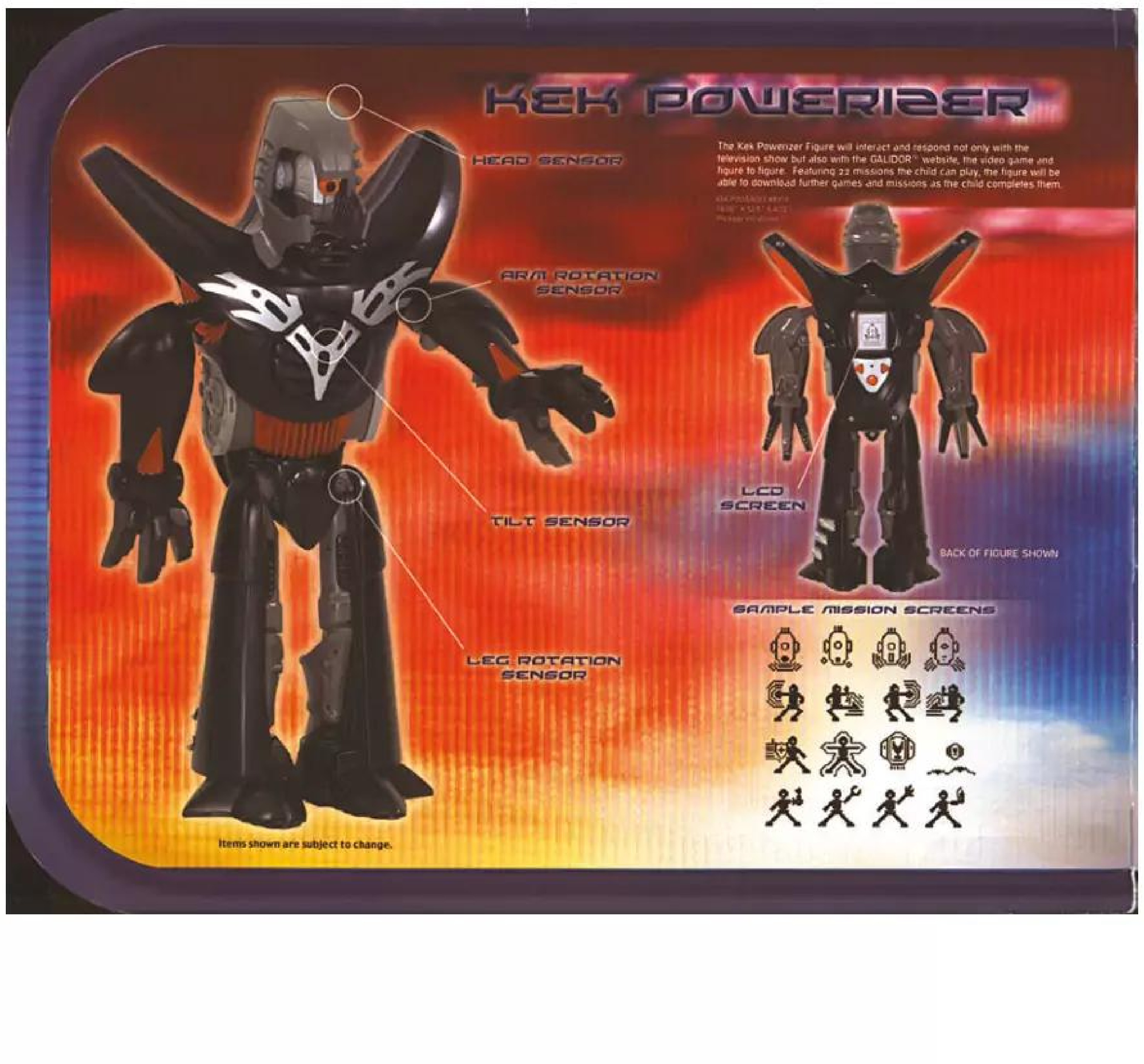
Realising that multimedia was the key to survive in a digital, technologically driven world was also a huge driver for the LEGO Group to break decades of reticence to entering licensing deals. Barely a decade after Galidor, there would be more licensed than non-licensed LEGO themes.

Every single element that had been created for Galidor, around 150 in total, had each required an expensive new mould. After the project had comprehensively failed, there was no money left for another big swing to save the company. Jørgen Vig Knudstorp and his team had to use the existing System in order to turn the LEGO Group around. They went back to basics and unleashed a resurgence of the brick that has continued ever since. That turnaround was so successful that the company has never doubted the brick's relevance since, even though digital experiences are more prevalent in the lives of children than ever before.

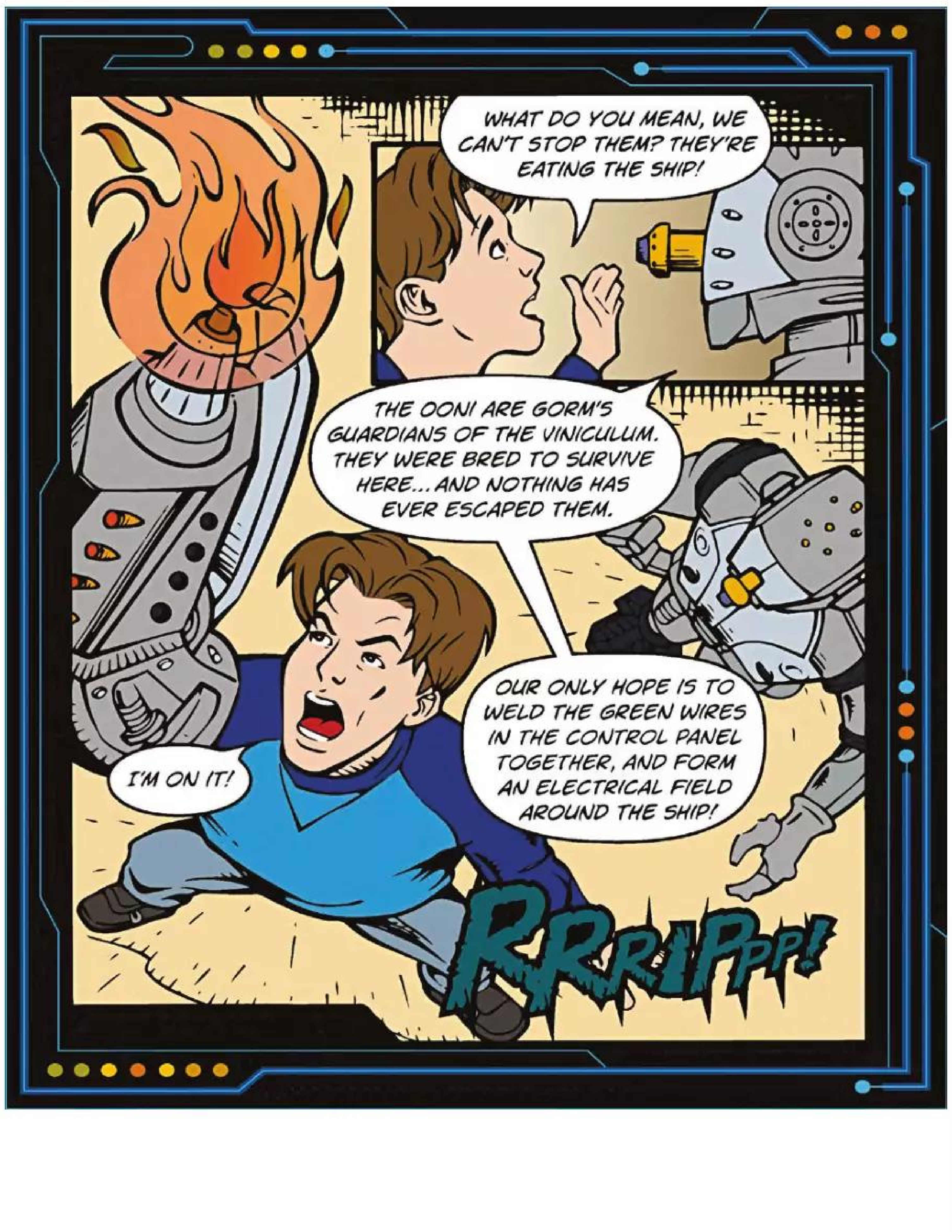
It is interesting to note that the LEGO Group is still attempting to figure out how to seamlessly blend physical and digital play spaces. There have been many attempts, including Fusion, Hidden Side and VIDIYO, with mixed success – even the typically secretive LEGO Group has acknowledged that this nexus remains maddeningly elusive. In many ways, the ACS technology of Project Genesis was the most ambitious approach ever attempted by the company to integrate digital and physical, which is all the more impressive given that it was the first attempt.

That's a word that sums up Project Genesis well – ambitious. Unfocused innovation though can be as ambitious as it likes. If it isn't executed correctly and isn't developed in a sustainable way, then it is unlikely to find success. Galidor didn't come close to reaching the expectations of LEGO management and instead became the butt of a joke. The brick is still at the heart of the LEGO Group's offering almost 25 years later, studs and tubes intact.

GALIDOR™
DEFENDERS OF THE OUTER DIMENSION



The Kek Powerizer Figure will interact and respond not only with the television show but also with the GALIDOR™ website, the video game and figure to figure. Featuring 22 missions the child can play, the figure will be able to download further games and missions as the child completes them.


WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WE CAN'T STOP THEM? THEY'RE EATING THE SHIP!
THE OONI ARE GORM'S GUARDIANS OF THE VINICULUM. THEY WERE BRED TO SURVIVE HERE... AND NOTHING HAS EVER ESCAPED THEM.
OUR ONLY HOPE IS TO WELD THE GREEN WIRES IN THE CONTROL PANEL TOGETHER, AND FORM AN ELECTRICAL FIELD AROUND THE SHIP!
I'M ON IT!
RRRIPPP!

***Top row, left to right:** This type of functionality was supposed to extend to other Project Genesis products.*

The Galidor website.

After Disney took over the Family Channel, there was little promotion for Galidor – despite it having a Drew Struzan poster.

***Bottom row, left to right:** The LEGO Group's internal magazine informed employees about the Galidor launch event.*

Stores weren't sure whether these belonged in the LEGO aisle or the action figure aisle.

9316 Kek Powerizer incorporated the ACS technology.

Galidor played a significant role in the LEGO Group's history, despite it failing to connect with children.

Blocks

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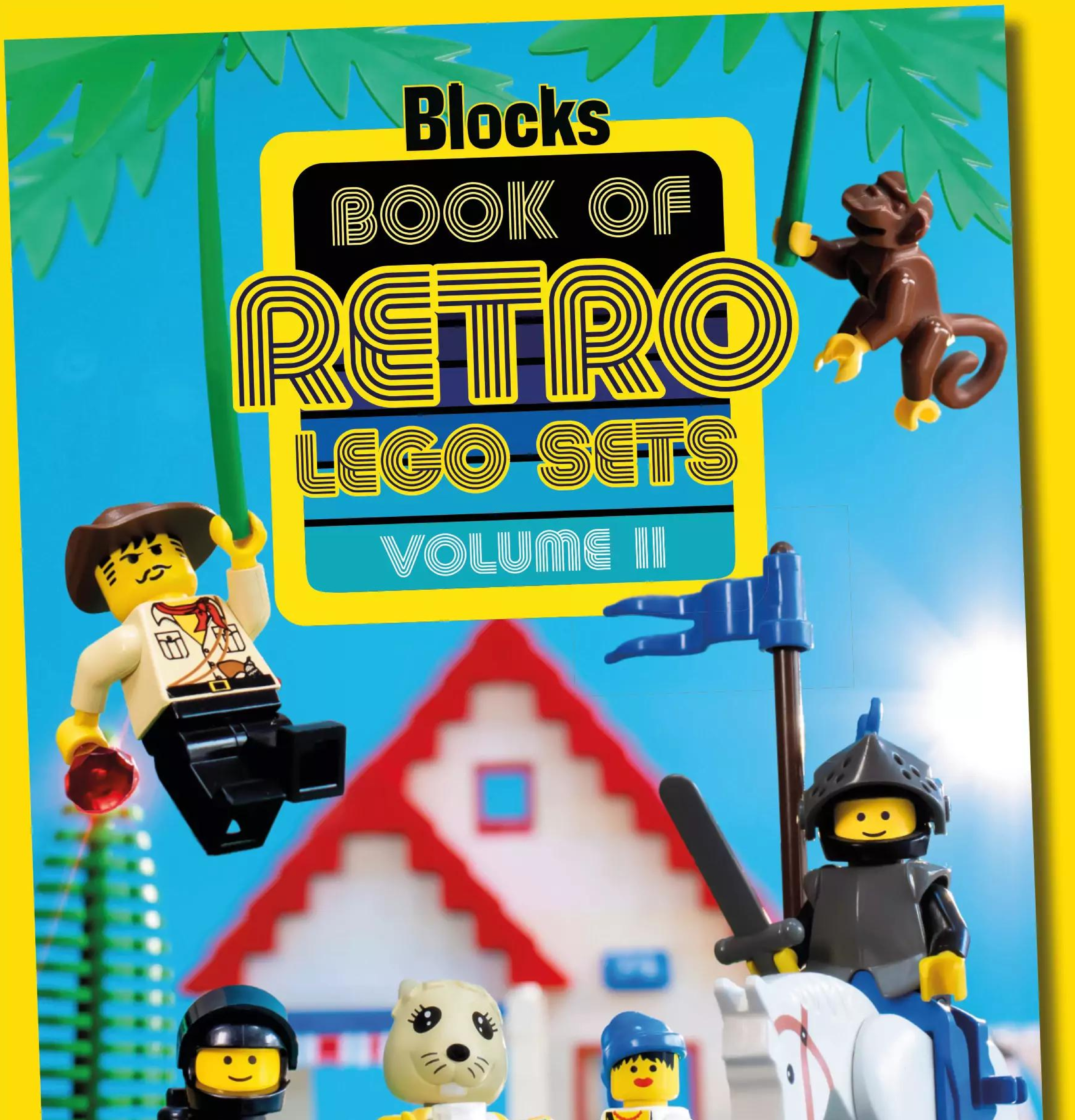
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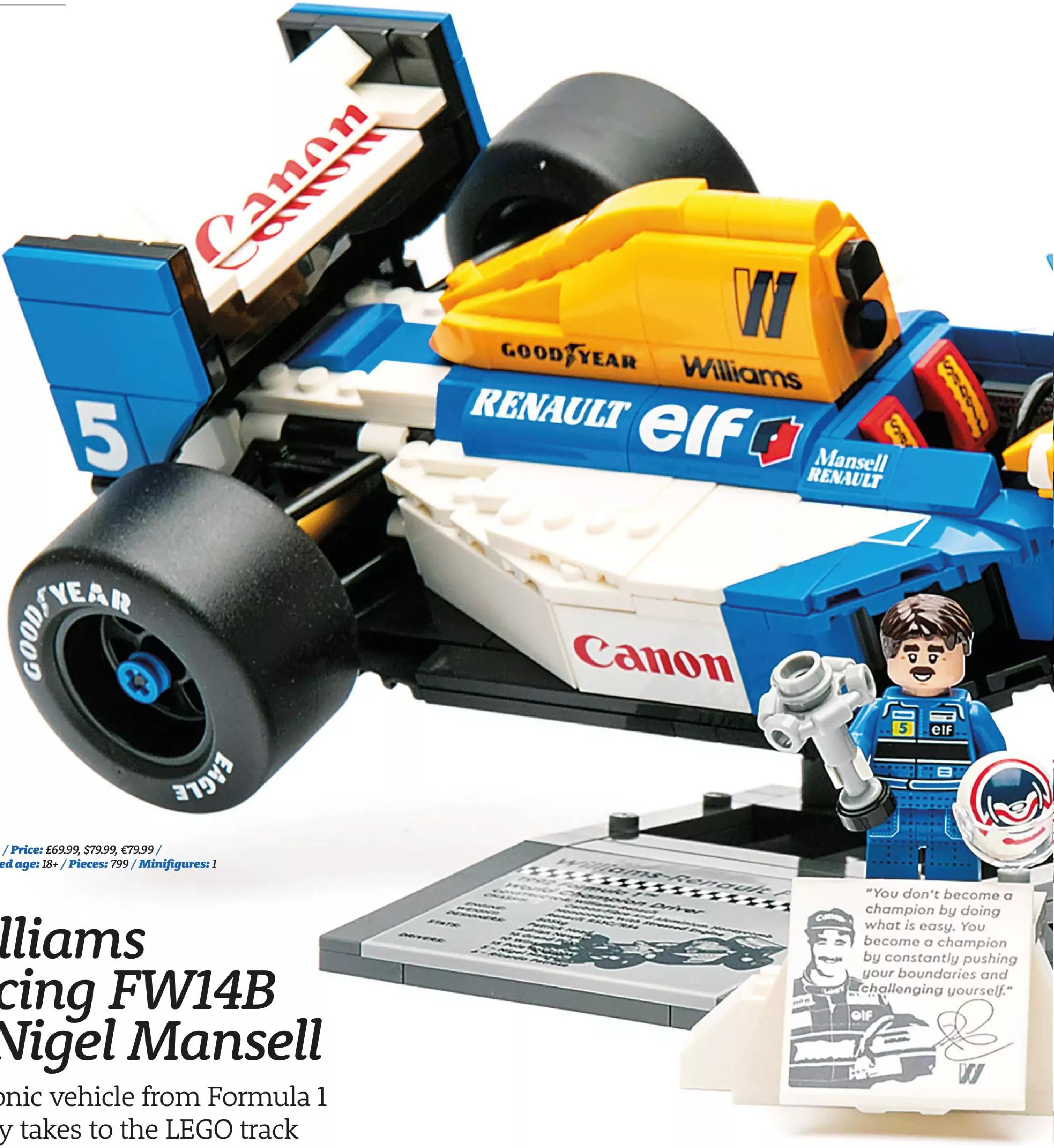

"You don't become a champion by doing what is easy. You become a champion by constantly pushing your boundaries and challenging yourself."

10353

Theme: *Icons* / ***Price:*** *£69.99, $79.99, €79.99* /
Recommended age: *18+* / ***Pieces:*** *799* / ***Minifigures:*** *1*

Williams Racing FW14B & Nigel Mansell

An iconic vehicle from Formula 1 history takes to the LEGO track

Following the success of 10330 McLaren MP4/4, this second entry in the classic Formula 1 car series celebrates the Williams FW14B that brought Nigel Mansell his long-overdue and only F1 title. Williams and Mansell dominated the 1992 season. Thanks to the technical advances in its active suspension and the ingenuity of F1 legends Patrick Head and Adrian Newey, the FW14B and its Renault 3.5 litre V10 engine is still considered one of the most sophisticated vehicles ever to race.

As the McLaren has already proved, this scale is excellent for capturing the shape of such cars and most essential details. The LEGO design team has benefitted from exclusive access to the original FW14B and has brought lots of additional details to the build compared to 10330, particularly when it comes to the interior workings of the car.

The build starts with the large floor of the car before adding the simple rear axle construction. This uses the same suspension strut elements from the McLaren and they are perfectly placed here. Gold elements dotted throughout the build represent the active suspension that was so important to Williams' success.

A detailed engine bay housing the Renault V10 is also impressively formed and cleverly uses 1x5 Technic half beams to mimic the cylinders. Small tiles and plates surround the engine block and stickered tiles should show the Renault name. Blue minifigure whip accessories coil along each side of the car, mimicking the complex hydraulic components of the vehicle with a minifigure head element used as the hydraulic fluid reservoir. It's a neatly constructed and accurate part of the build, authentically replicating the real car well.

That section of the car is tightly enclosed with angled plates that give the impression of being curved side pods, with the large stickered Canon logo prominently displayed along each panel. This is one of the few weak points of the car; the logo doesn't feel bold enough compared to the actual vehicle and even more annoyingly, the colour matching between the white sticker background with the tile underneath isn't what it should be.

Ahead of the engine bay is a nicely detailed cockpit with a Sabelt race harness and steering wheel. This is connected via a long axle to the front steering rack; the forward wheels have a suitably low range of motion, using a simple rotating barrel to allow them to turn. Multiple SNOT brackets and plates are attached ready for more elements to connect to later. The bodywork and shaping of the air intakes where the nose connects to the main car are smartly formed from multiple brackets, curves and SNOT elements that join neatly without gaps.

Wrapping the surface in white and blue angled tiles immediately creates

Williams
RENAULT
elf
5
MAGNETI MARELLI
GOODYEAR
Canon
Bull
WILLIAMS
GOODYEAR
EAGLE

Mansell had retired from F1 for years before being convinced to return to Williams.

the distinctive colour scheme without resorting to stickers and although the shade of blue could be a little darker, the Williams starts to come to life. Blue and yellow tiles with more sponsor logos run along the nose – yellow slopes and cut wedge tiles make a great transition between the nose and cockpit surround.

Building the unique front wing assembly is a simple process. A single 2x6 tile is connected by a hinge plate and a complex mix of slopes and plates make the nose cone itself. As with the McLaren, this is a less than perfect approach, with some unsightly gaps that too easily betray its component parts, but it does as much as possible within the confines of the available elements.

The rear of the Williams is far more convincing and these sections of the build are significantly more complicated and use much more sophisticated techniques. The rear wing uses stud and clip connections with ball and socket joints to angle the layered wing blades accurately. This works very well and the split-wing optical illusion effect is effective, but it does partially rely on accurate sticker placement.

The removable engine cover is an even more complex module, using a bewildering assortment of plates, jumpers, clips and SNOT brackets in multiple orientations. After being covered in an array of tiles, slopes and more stickers, the engine cover slots neatly into place and there is only one set of parts to add – the wheels. The criticisms of the moulded wheels that the McLaren used have been addressed here. The rear wheels are correctly proportioned and noticeably wider than the front wheels; the Good Year Eagle logo embossed on the rim looks great too and these new tyres are a much-needed improvement that lends an additional degree of accuracy.

Nigel Mansell was renowned throughout his career for his driving skills and determination to succeed. His minifigure is instantly recognisable, with a dual-printed face featuring his trademark moustache and a super-detailed race suit print. When placed alongside the stand-mounted FW15B, the car is an even more impressive display set than the already excellent McLaren. If the accuracy and quality of these racing icon series continue to improve at this pace, then F1 fans and LEGO fans will be in for a great ride.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

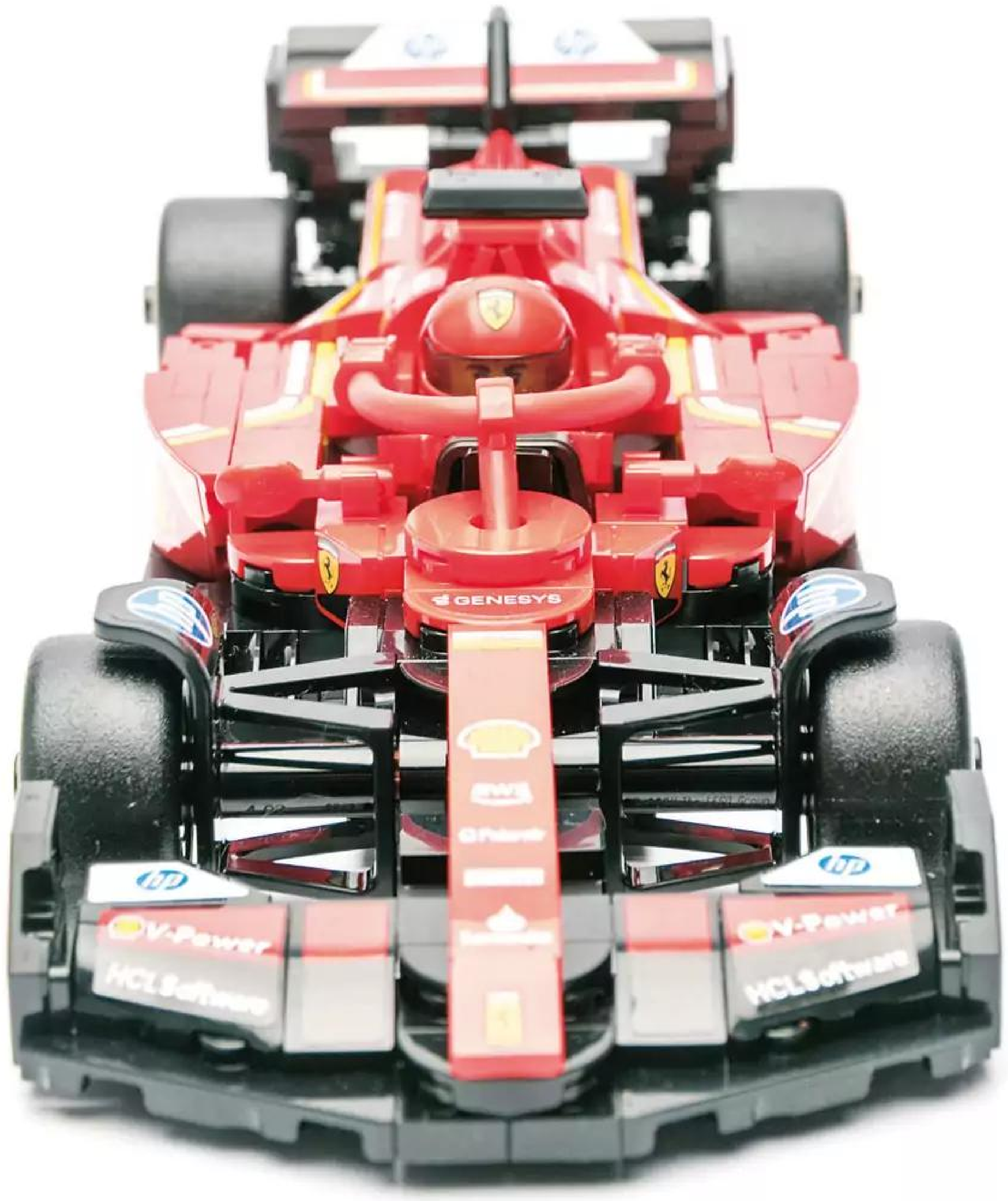
Verdict
88

An enjoyable, intricate build produces a superb display set that packs in many of the details that ensured this technically advanced F1 car became an icon.

77242

Theme: *Speed Champions /* ***Price:*** *£22.99, $26.99, €26.99 /*
Recommended age: *10+ /* ***Pieces:*** *275 /* ***Minifigures:*** *1*

Ferrari SF-24



The technical regulations for a Formula 1 car are incredibly detailed, highly specific and thoroughly listed by the FIA in a mammoth 177 page document updated for each season. This governs everything about the cars, from their overall dimensions and number of gears down to the fuel flow rate and camshaft weight. It's the small gaps between these incredibly tightly defined rules and their interpretation where innovation lies and teams can gain an advantage.

It also explains how every car is subtly different despite adhering to the same set of rules. You wouldn't expect that this level of nuance could be reflected in the wave of LEGO Speed Champions F1 sets, but amazingly, the design team has done just that – and every one of the ten cars has an entirely different build process.

There are similarities and they all share the same new elements, but this is great news for dedicated fans who are intent on collecting the entire grid and fear it could become repetitive. What's also great is that those fans who only intend to collect one or two cars can be assured that each team has been given the highly innovative and rewarding build experience that Speed Champions has become associated with.

As is often the case, the Ferrari stood out as one of the most attractive cars in the 2024 lineup. The LEGO version is a terrific recreation of the SF-24 but relies on a relatively large number of stickers. In this case, it's an acceptable and very appropriate use of stickers; where possible, printed elements add detail but, understandably, many of the curved surfaces require a little help to show off the sponsor logos. The colour matching with the red background is very accurate.

More impressive is how many printed elements have been incorporated into the build, including several side-printed plates along the side pods that visually connect with a sticker. The side pods also make clever use of hinges to shape the rear part of the pods – they taper pleasingly toward the rear axle, although they are a little blocky and less elegant than is ideal.

The most unusual techniques are found behind the cockpit as the intake and camera are not connected by studs and simply slot into a void between two car door elements.

It's a delightful and effective build, with the finished article looking less like a LEGO set than usual, thanks in part to the swathes of red bodywork that aren't interrupted with tell-tale clues of how they're connected. Tifosi should be delighted with how their team is represented in this incarnation and one of the most famous teams has been given a much deserved level of attention.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict
84
This is a fine rendition of the prancing horse in this special Formula 1 collection, but the slightly blocky side pods lack refinement in a set that is otherwise excellent.

Top left: *The SF-24 was a serious contender, earning an emotional first win at Monaco for Leclerc.*

Top right: *Speed Champions is part of the LEGO Group's collaboration with Formula 1.*

Right: *This is the first time that Speed Champions has partnered with F1.*

Below: *The driver minifigure has an appropriate uniform.*

77243

Theme: *Speed Champions / **Price:** £22.99, $26.99, €26.99 /*
***Recommended age:** 18+ / **Pieces:** 251 / **Minifigures:** 1*

***Above:** The Red Bull dominance finally ended in 2024.*

***Left:** Most of the sponsor logos are achieved using labels.*

***Below:** Verstappen retained the 2024 World Drivers' Championship in 2024.*

***Bottom:** One of the set's nice part uses is the LEGO spoon.*

Oracle Red Bull Racing RB20

While Max Verstappen retained his driver's world championship title in 2024, it was a different story for his Red Bull team, who were surprisingly pipped into third place. Despite early dominance in the opening races, their rivals soon caught the Red Bulls – issues with understeer and stability continued to plague the team throughout the season.

However, you wouldn't know it from looking at the Speed Champions version of the RB20, which looks utterly spectacular and every bit like a title contender. The dark blue panels are stunning, contrasting with the bold yellow and red accent colours. The unique and carefully designed side pods and chassis are brilliantly created in LEGO elements, using inverted slopes and wedges.

These sections then slope inwards toward the rear axle neatly and accurately. As with all of the cars in the series, the rear wheels are mounted using a Technic axle threaded through a transparent minifigure neck bracket. These areas look far more convincing than earlier LEGO F1 cars, yet again demonstrating how far this theme has pushed the envelope.

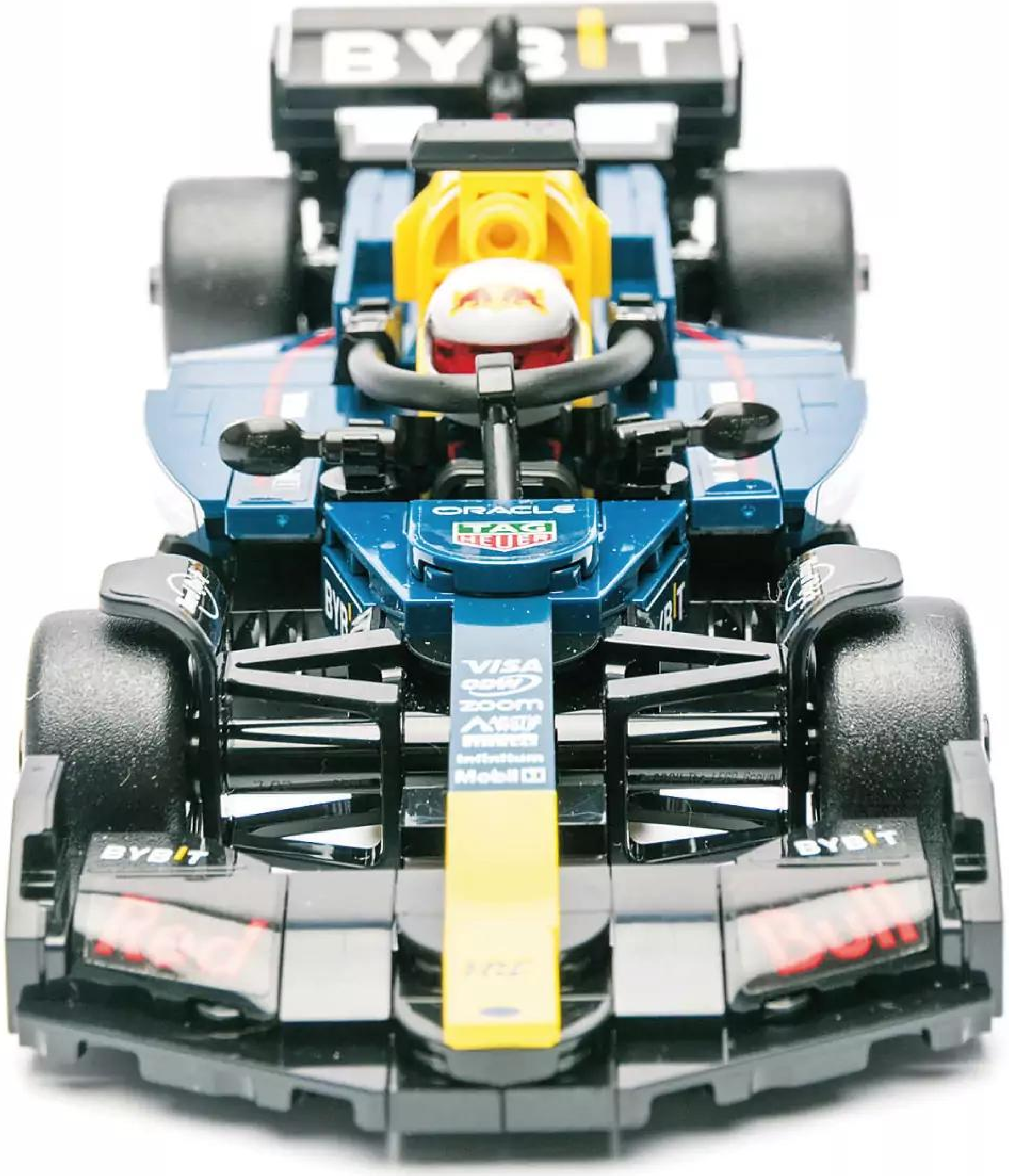
The rear wing design is also standard across the cars, which is appropriate given how heavily governed their design is, and the exhaust and rear light look particularly good on the RB20 with the familiar Oracle logo emblazoned above it. The rear engine cover uses the same printed wedge as the 77246 Visa Cash App RB VCARB 01 F1 Race Car, but in the traditional red and yellow colours that are repeated across the printed nose cone.

The only blemish on this otherwise excellent design is the use of arched window frame elements behind the driver to create the shape of the engine cover. This technique is used in subtly different ways across several of the cars, but the slight difference in width between the arch and the wedge elements makes it feel a little clunky here.

Stickers are employed to add additional detail and these work incredibly well on the front over-wheel winglets with the Hard Rock logo. These new suspension elements are used on all of the Speed Champions F1 cars and look superb; the wheels are attached with a Technic pin and a cross axle hole, allowing the suspension and winglet to connect to the chassis.

The Red Bull may not have been the dominant force in the 2024 season that it was in years prior, but the LEGO version is challenging right at the front of the pack.

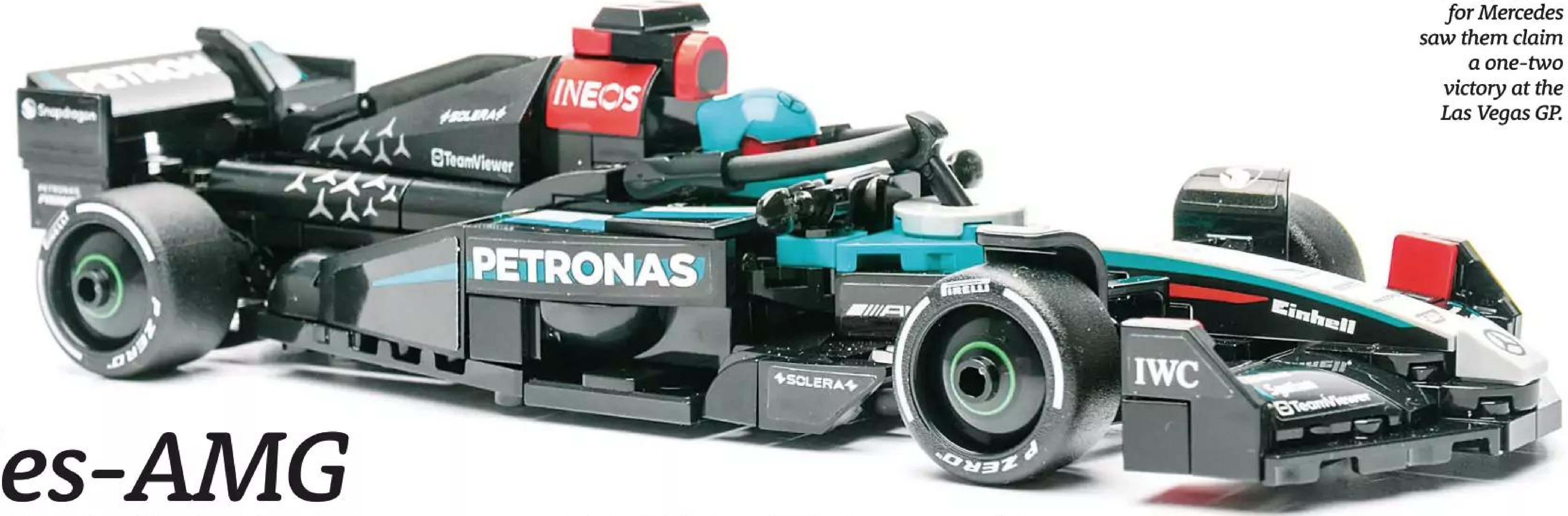
DAVE CARTLIDGE



Verdict
87
This excellent rendition of the car that won the 2024 World Drivers' Championship will please fans of the team – and anyone else who appreciates impressive brick engineering.

77244

Theme: Speed Champions / **Price:** £22.99, $26.99, €26.99 / **Recommended age:** 10+ / **Pieces:** 267 / **Minifigures:** 1



A strong season for Mercedes saw them claim a one-two victory at the Las Vegas GP.

Mercedes-AMG PETRONAS F1 Team W15 E Performance

For many reasons, Sir Lewis Hamilton's victory at Silverstone 2024 was emotional, memorable and historic. The Mercedes W15 was a serious competitor in 2024 and managed to notch up two race wins for Lewis in his final season with the team and two for his teammate George Russell.

Neither driver is featured in this set, however. As with the entire Speed Champions F1 range, the included minifigure is a generic character, with a unique torso print and new helmet design. The helmet shapes are accurate to the real-life versions and the incorporated visor element makes them appear more lifelike than the usual LEGO helmets.

The Mercedes helmet is striking in the lineup and the colour matches the bodywork accent very well. What's slightly unfortunate is that the obvious driver's helmet does protrude above the cleverly created Halo crash protection bar. This is achieved with a single hose element bent in half and connected to the bodywork by two clips on either side of the cockpit.

It's not just the poor Mercedes driver that the Halo does not properly protect, the issue is repeated across the entire range – a minor niggle, but in a series that strives for accuracy, quite a flaw.

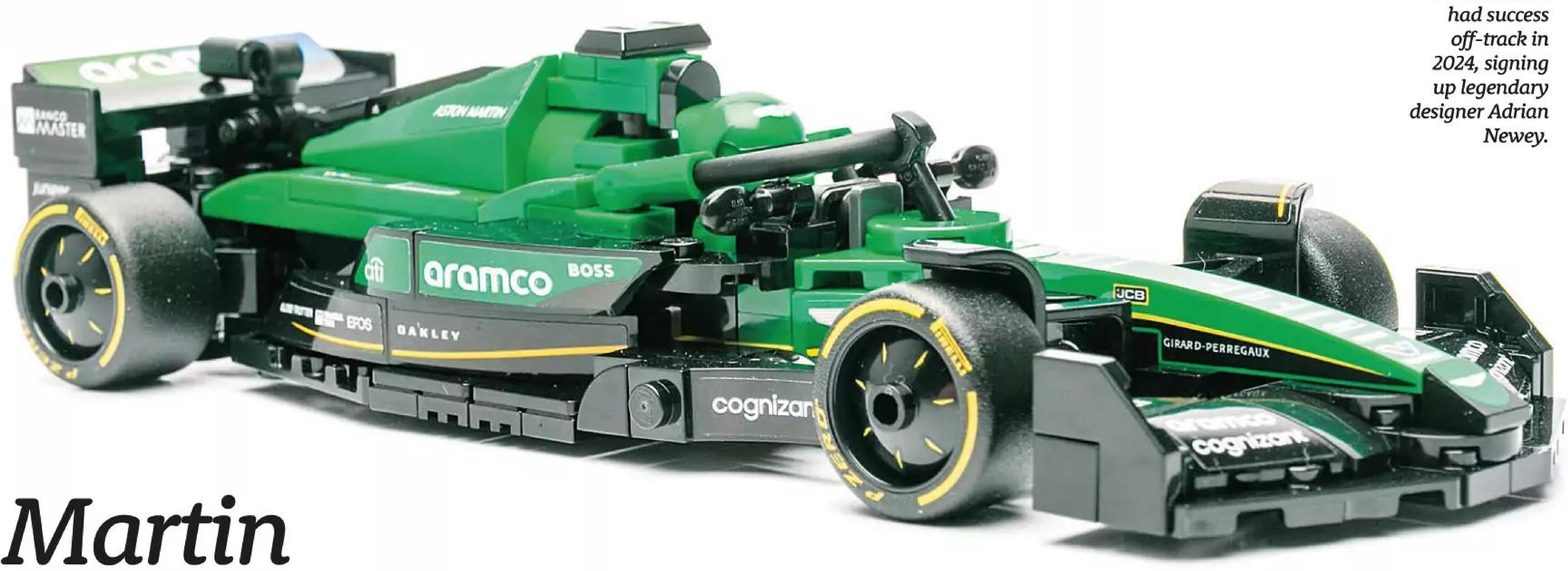
This doesn't detract from the overall look of the car, though; the stripes along the sides of the W15, in particular, are brilliantly reproduced with layered plates, in combination with stickers. Some pops of colour on the front wing and air intake above the driver are nice touches, as well as some outstanding printed elements to show the detailed livery at the rear.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict
82
The excellent combination of stickers, plates and printed elements capture the look of the Mercedes – another solid entry in the collection.

77245

Theme: Speed Champions / **Price:** £22.99, $26.99, €26.99 / **Recommended age:** 10+ / **Pieces:** 269 / **Minifigures:** 1



Aston Martin had success off-track in 2024, signing up legendary designer Adrian Newey.

Aston Martin Aramco F1 AMR24

It's unfortunate that despite having a palette of more than four dozen colours, nothing in the LEGO collection comes close to Aston Martin Racing Green. This isn't a new problem; the recent 76925 Aston Martin Safety Car & AMR23 also failed to capture the distinct colour convincingly. What's worse is that the inside of the instruction manual, as with all of the Speed Champions F1 cars, features a side-by-side of the actual vehicle with the LEGO counterpart – the differences between the two are immediately apparent.

Aside from that most obvious of inconsistencies, the build is an accomplished one and replicates the car's look nicely. The scooped side pods are excellent and the use of teeth plate elements at the front of this section makes an aggressive-looking but pretty accurate rendition of the venturi tunnel openings – it's a clever use of parts that some other cars in the range also use to good effect.

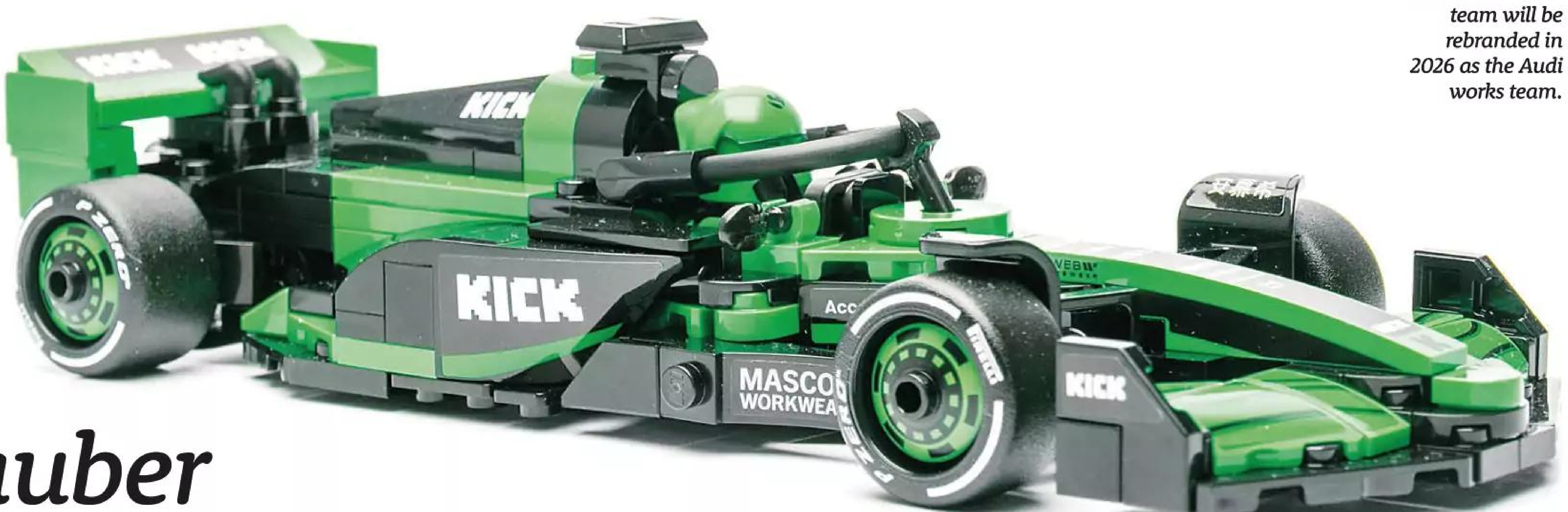
Speed Champions fans are familiar with the technique of using a minifigure accessory to form a rear wing, wedged between the engine cover – in this case, it's a blade rather than the more usual ski. It's a little less successful here due to the gaps it leaves along the engine cover itself, and the contrast between the 'wrong' green and black makes this gap even more apparent.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict
69
A perfectly enjoyable build experience uses the expected range of interesting parts but can't overcome the frustrating colour mismatch.

77247

Theme: *Speed Champions /*
Price: *£22.99, $26.99, €26.99 /*
Recommended age: *10+ /*
Pieces: *259 /* ***Minifigures:*** *1*



The Kick Sauber team will be rebranded in 2026 as the Audi works team.

KICK Sauber F1 Team C44

Sauber adopted the Kick branding and green and black colour scheme for 2024 and the Speed Champions team has done a good job capturing the car's bold look. The build features some nice detail around the cockpit, using side-mounted panel elements to create a smooth surface, but it is a little raised against the side pod.

Quarter curved tiles make convincing air intakes in front of the pods and the curved cutout slope elements look particularly striking when the Kick stickers are applied and aligned with the green plates running along the car's floor. The front wing is the most striking area, however. As with all of the vehicles in the range, the design is identically built and attached with a single cross axle to the front wheels.

Although the real cars have multiple front wing blade elements, the LEGO versions understandably can't replicate this; the Sauber's front wing is somewhat unique due to the team livery highlighting each wing element and the set has to achieve this look with labels. Even perfectly applied stickers will always have a slight gap between elements, so using three on each side of the front wing is particularly challenging – the result is only moderately successful.

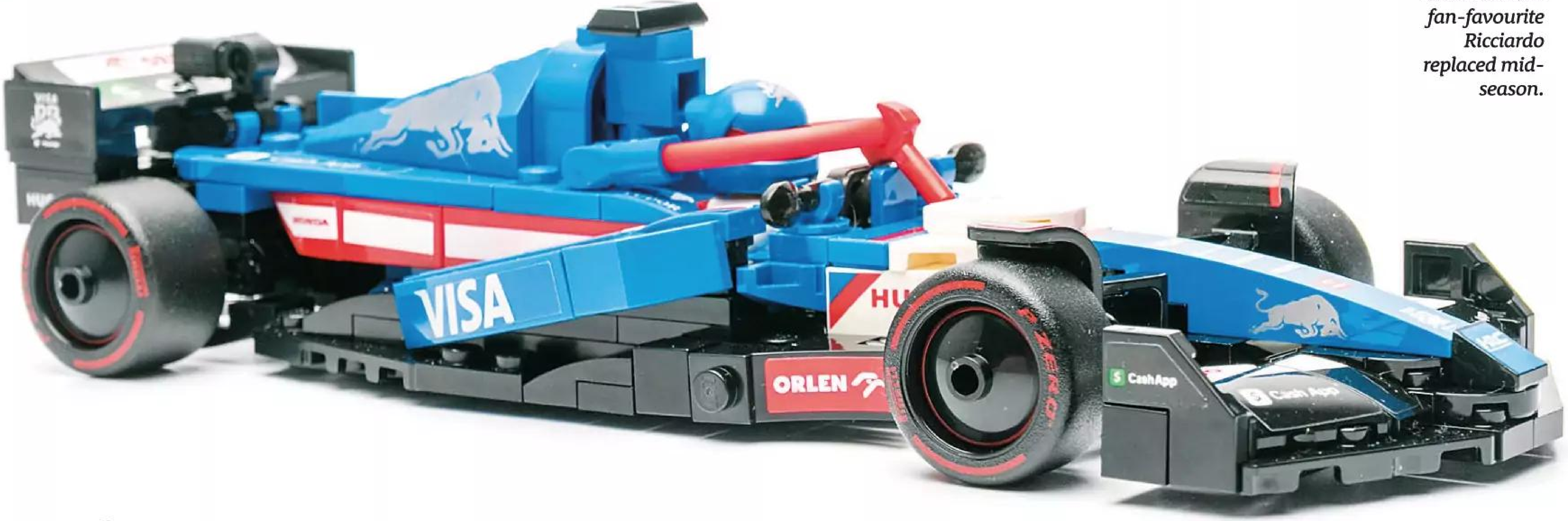
It's a reasonable compromise and the overall look is still appealing, even if this set isn't the best of the Formula 1 wave.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict **76** **The bold colour scheme is replicated well, with some nice detail around the cockpit. Unfortunately, the front wing stickers are only moderately effective.**

77246

Theme: *Speed Champions /*
Price: *£22.99, $26.99, €26.99 /*
Recommended age: *18+ /*
Pieces: *248 /* ***Minifigures:*** *1*



The Racing Bulls had a challenging 2024 that saw fan-favourite Ricciardo replaced mid-season.

Visa Cash App RB VCARB 01

Rebranding isn't easy, as the Red Bull feeder team has proven over the last few years. While the names Alpha Tauri and Toro Rosso are now just fondly remembered monikers, the team debuted a new name in 2024 that invited and received some (probably deserved) ridicule.

The Visa Cash App RB F1 team was keen to point out that the car isn't simply a rebadged version of the championship-winning Red Bull from 2023 and proved this by having a mediocre season. Reflecting the real-world situation in which parts were shared between Red Bull and the RB team, the set's rear engine cover features a great print of the logo.

The rest of the car is equally well decorated. One of the most distinctive features of the VCARB 01 is the heavily sloped side pod design that allows increased airflow to the rear of the car. This angled section is even more visually noticeable due to its large VISA logo.

This part of the build uses a hidden bar element in the chassis to attach to an open stud in the slope elements that provides a degree of rotation. The upper surface of this section has a red and white ribbon motif that snakes from the cockpit through to the rear of the car, moving through different aspects and portions of the bodywork. The alignment of this stripe between the upper side pod surface and vertical chassis is very impressive.

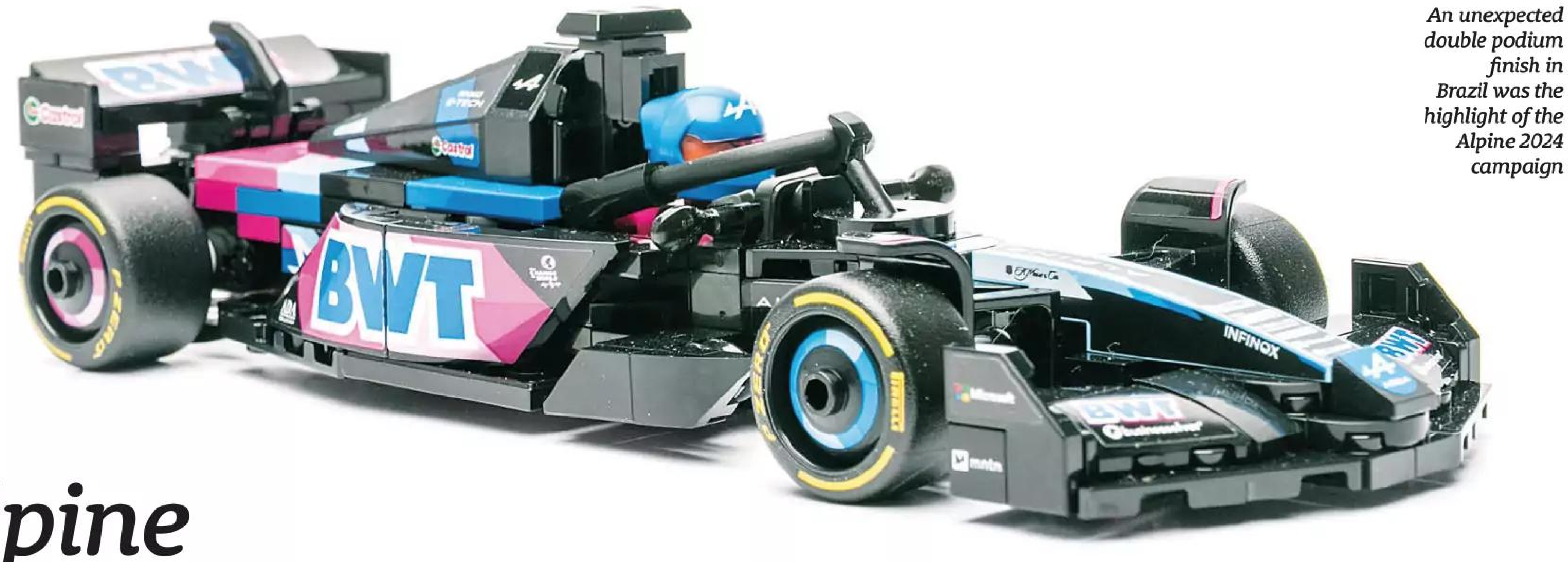
While the name may be a mouthful, the car is a faithful recreation of the VCARB 01 that demonstrates some interesting techniques.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict **78** **An impressively faithful version of the terribly named car makes good use of stickers and some clever techniques. It stands out from an already impressive crowd.**

77248

Theme: *Speed Champions / **Price:** £22.99, $26.99, €26.99 / **Recommended age:** 10+ / **Pieces:** 258 / **Minifigures:** 1*



An unexpected double podium finish in Brazil was the highlight of the Alpine 2024 campaign

BWT Alpine F1 Team A524

The Alpine team has one of the most striking and recognisable liveries on the grid; the car has bright blue and pink highlights that contrast with the black bodywork. Clever use of tiles, particularly around the car's rear, capture this look very well on the LEGO version.

The rear engine cover and chassis are a bit boxy-looking, and the stripes don't quite form the correct chevron shape. As with the rest of this range, it's often advisable to deviate from the LEGO instructions and apply the stickers after the elements have been attached to the car. The pinpoint precision needed on sticker placement is most important when they will run across multiple surfaces. The Alpine doesn't suffer too badly in this regard, but the misalignment of stickers is often more noticeable when there are fewer to apply.

The hollow side pods are uniquely crafted but don't quite look as if they are attached to the rest of the car and show up the components that form them slightly too clearly. Other vehicles have similar side pod designs and don't have the same issue but given the complex fragility that these sections of bodywork carry, it's a decent enough version of the real thing.

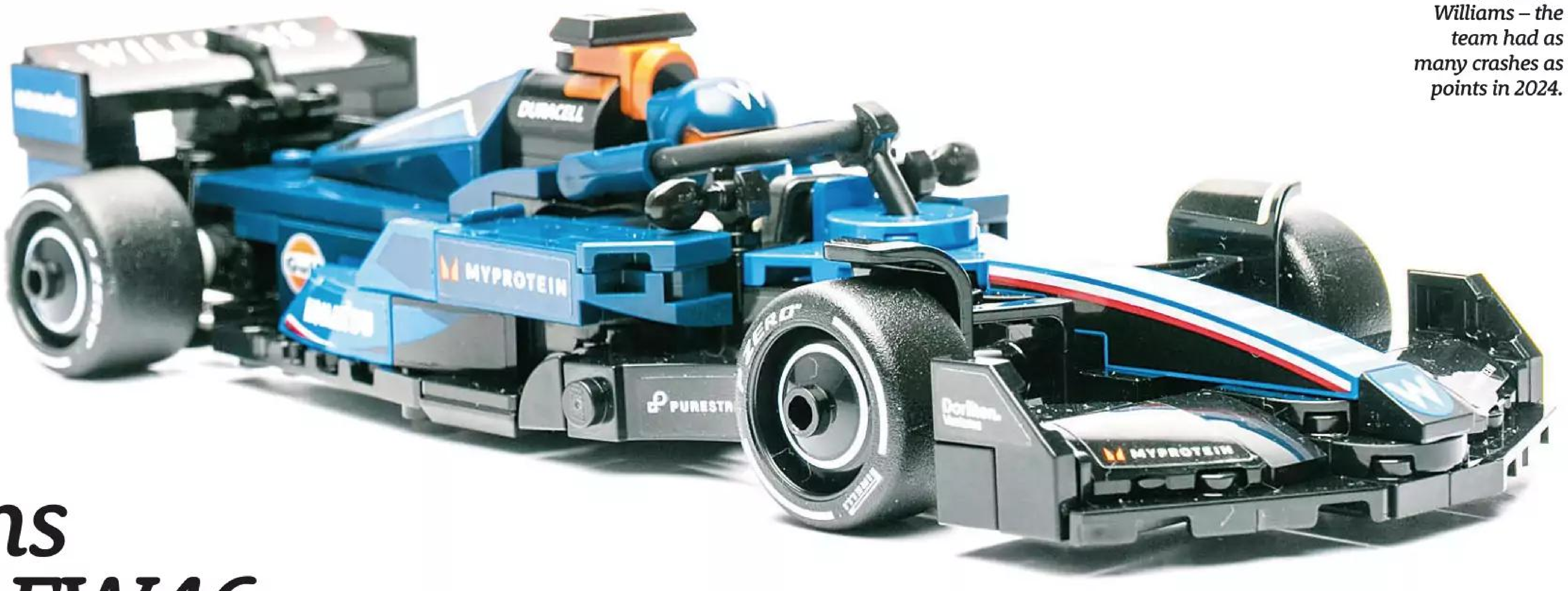
What's odd is that there is more blue and pink hidden away inside the build than is visible when it is on display. Despite such niggles, it's an enjoyable build and instantly recognisable – but the competition in this collection is stiff.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict **71** **The distinctive livery looks pretty good, but the chunky chassis is less effective. It's an impressive build that doesn't live up to the demanding Speed Champions standard.**

77249

Theme: *Speed Champions / **Price:** £22.99, $26.99, €26.99 / **Recommended age:** 10+ / **Pieces:** 263 / **Minifigures:** 1*



It was a season to forget for Williams – the team had as many crashes as points in 2024.

Williams Racing FW46

The Williams F1 team had a challenging 2024 season, with multiple costly crashes and mid-season driver changes. Fans of the famous team will be happy to see that the Speed Champions incarnation is entirely intact and can be rebuilt very quickly.

The FW46 features interesting build techniques, some of which only a couple of other cars in the range repeat. The cockpit and side pods are clever in this regard, using a side-built approach with layered tiles and curved plates.

The front air intakes are neatly formed from a pair of mirrored slopes connected to a 1x1 modified lamp holder plate and these dark blue slopes look fantastic alongside the lighter blue panels and curves that surround them. The void underneath these slopes does a good job of creating complexity in the bodywork and the car looks pretty accurate.

On the real car, the most striking visual element is the airbox above the driver's head, featuring sponsorship from Duracell. This is created quite well in brick form, although it does rely on sticker accuracy. The white wheel covers look good against the white hard compound tyres. These are a welcome departure from previous Speed Champions wheel designs and three different compounds are included across the range.

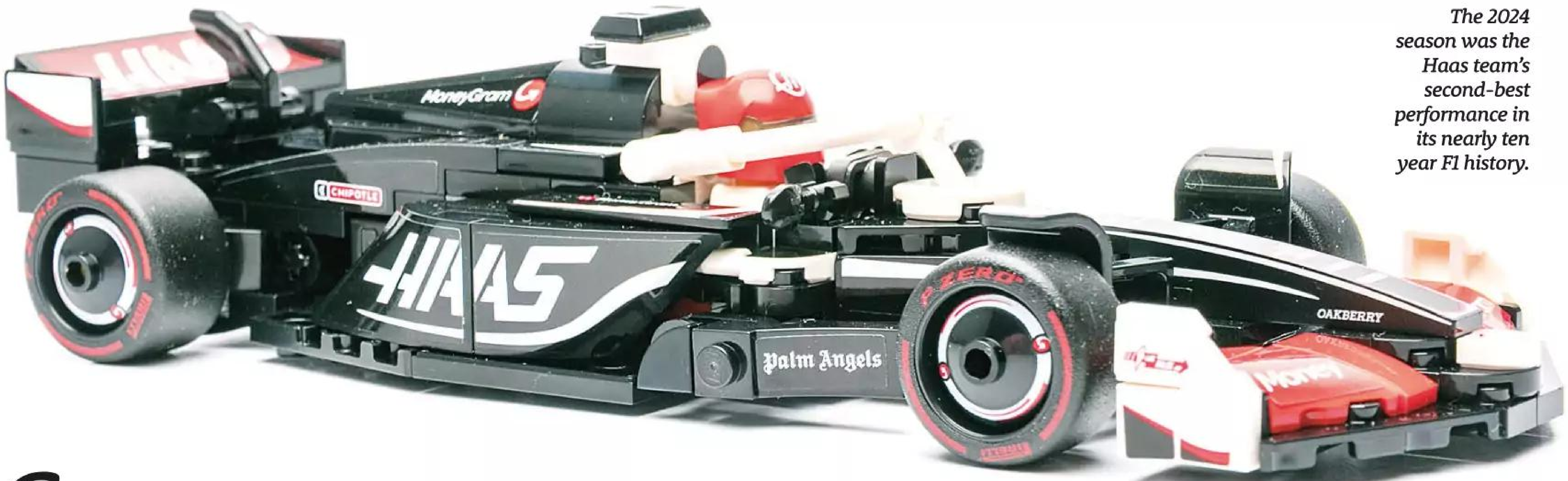
Even better than the accurate slick tyre design is that there is now differentiation between the front and back tyres, reflecting the nature of the real back wheel tyres being significantly wider than the front. It's another area where the new wave of LEGO F1 cars is more accurate than what has been offered in Speed Champions before.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict **78** **This is one of the more curious Formula 1 cars to build, using every trick in the brick box to deliver a decent replica of the FW46.**

77250

Theme: *Speed Champions* / ***Price:*** *£22.99, $26.99, €26.99* / ***Recommended age:*** *10+* / ***Pieces:*** *242* / ***Minifigures:*** *1*



The 2024 season was the Haas team's second-best performance in its nearly ten year F1 history.

MoneyGram Haas F1 Team VF-24

The 2024 season saw a resurgent Haas team claim seventh place in the Constructors' Championship. The VF-24 looks great in LEGO brick form; the red and white colour scheme is stunning against the plain black of the bodywork. The front and rear wings add a lot to this look.

Following the same form as all of the other cars in the range, the rear wing uses a single 2x6 curved slope that looks superb, especially with the logo stickers applied to the top and rear surfaces. The DRS controller is made from a single claw element and this simple but effective use of parts adds a level of realism that works well.

Where the rear wing uses a single large label, the side pods use a two-part technique where the stickers must be placed accurately to achieve the desired effect. It's another situation where stickers are best applied after the elements have been attached, despite what the instructions say. However, the side pods look excellent once in place and stickered up.

The use of wedge plates underneath this area to create the car's floor is also impressive; the angled plates are mounted upside down using minifigure neck brackets that attach to the chassis with a 1x1 round tile with bar element. It's a clever technique to attach a large element using thinner connection points without exposing studs that would conflict with the rest of the bodywork.

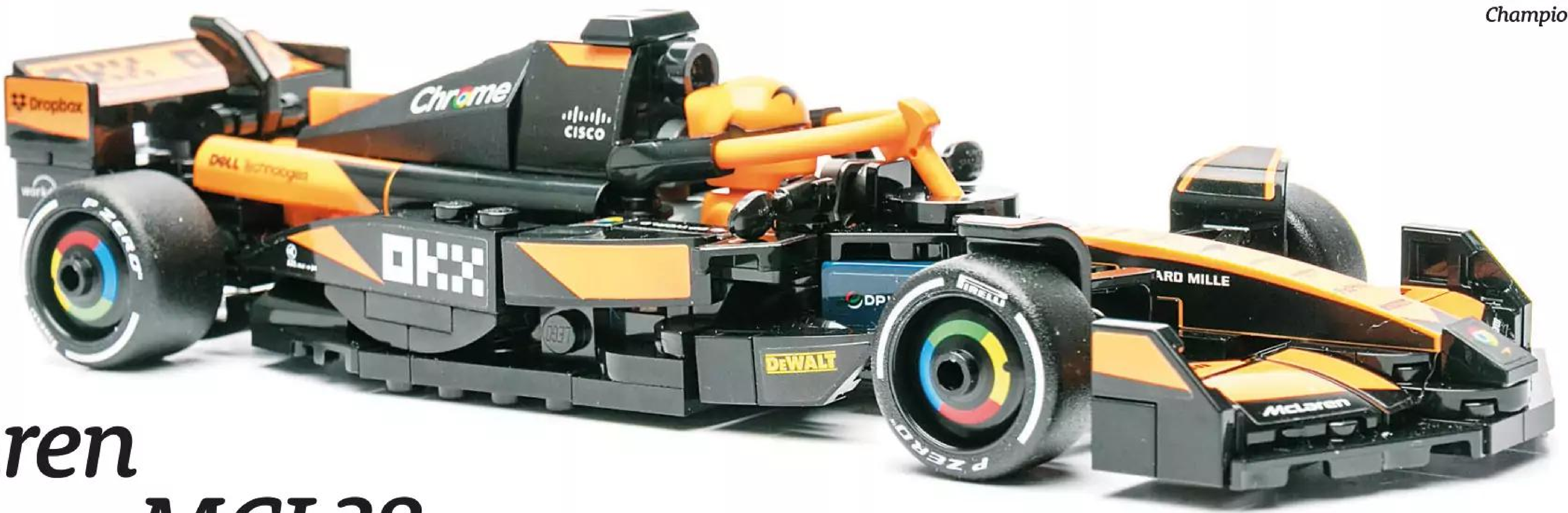
While the Haas team might not be a household name among casual fans, a fun build results in an impressive car.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict **79** The Haas is very enjoyable to put together and visually impressive, but a misplaced sticker could easily spoil the aesthetic.

77251

Theme: *Speed Champions* / ***Price:*** *£22.99, $26.99, €26.99* / ***Recommended age:*** *10+* / ***Pieces:*** *269* / ***Minifigures:*** *1*



With 6 wins and 21 podiums, the McLaren won the F1 Constructors' Championship.

McLaren F1 Team MCL38

More than a quarter of a century since McLaren last won the F1 Constructors' Championship, the Woking-based team finally retook the top spot in 2024 and only narrowly missed out on the Drivers' title. The MCL38 became the car to beat, partly thanks to its upgraded aerodynamic package and incredible cornering performance.

It's fitting that the Speed Champions version of this World Championship winning car also has some of the most ingenious techniques in the range. Some sections early in the build process feel like the LEGO design team is showing off; claws are mounted vertically through open studs on the chassis so that clips connect to parts in the floor section.

The car's rear is impressive as the two back side pod elements are angled inwards using 1x2 round plates. Everything about creating the bodywork is enjoyable and impressive in equal measure. The clever-clever way that the air intake above the driver's head comes together is a fitting finale to the build.

The distinctive Google Chrome logo on each wheel cover is also accurately portrayed, although using a curved element – as they are on all the F1 cars in the range – limits the accuracy to an extent. Another common design element across the series are the sometimes fragile connection points of the barge boards; usually attached by a single stud, they can easily get knocked out of alignment and spoil the look.

Despite these niggles, the McLaren represents some of the best part uses and clever techniques that Speed Champions excels at.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict **90** The World Championship winning car gets the full Speed Champions treatment and looks absolutely fantastic as a result. This theme continues to push what the System can achieve.

60474

Theme: *City* / ***Price:*** *£24.99, $29.99, €29.99* /
Recommended age: *6+* / ***Pieces:*** *313* / ***Minifigures:*** *3*

F1 Grid with VCARB & Sauber Race Cars

The LEGO City range has already delivered several fun F1-themed sets, which have focused on the off-track action as much as the actual racing. 60474 F1 Grid with VCARB & Sauber Race Cars manages to redress that balance somewhat, although the actual track element requires more than a bit of imagination.

Coming in at the same price point as the great 60443 F1 Pit Stop & Pit Crew with Ferrari Car, this set doubles the car count, has roughly the same number of parts and has only one fewer minifigure.

Despite being similar on paper, these differences feel very marked. The location, to put it mildly, is sparsely furnished. That's not to downplay the very clever start/finish line, but in terms of an actual grid, there is relatively less substance than, say, a garage and pit crew. Red and white stripes and some curved grey tiles do a reasonably good job of looking like TecPro or Armco barriers, but these two sections are barely as long as a car.

The small gantry to one side of the imagined track seems a little more impressive, providing enough space for a trophy and a place to store the chequered flag. Proudly standing on this elevated platform is, presumably, one of the many random celebrities that are invited to wave the flag to the race winner – judging by the floppy hair and bright orange zipped-up biker jacket, they're either an obscure local DJ or, more likely, an ageing movie actor.

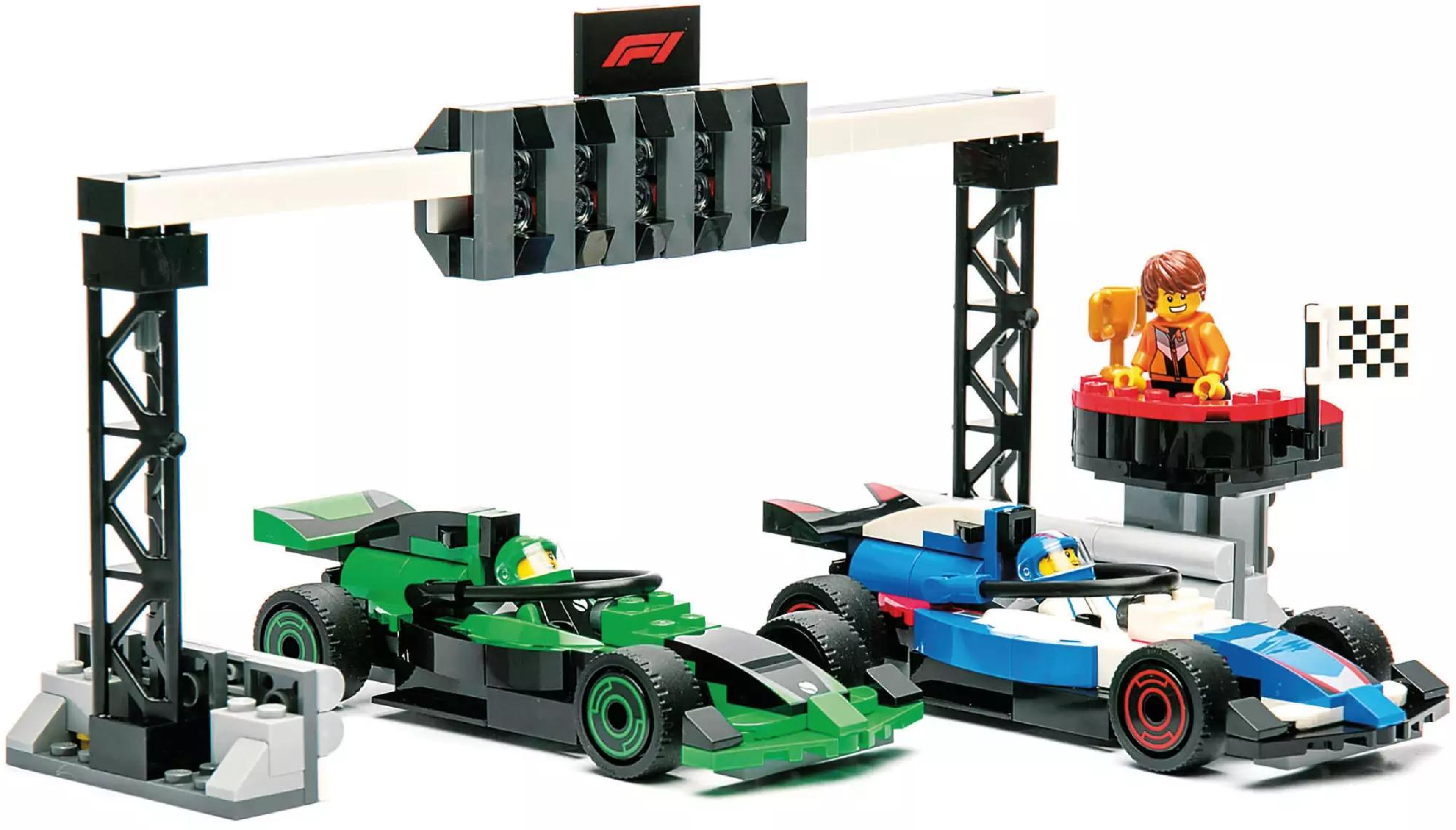
Straddling the start line are the famous five lights that signal the countdown to action. These are neatly made from a combination of transparent white and red round tiles with an additional offset row of transparent lights above them. Topped with a printed F1 logo tile, a simple slider behind the structure switches the lights from red to white, and 'it's lights out, and away we go!' It's the only play feature, but it's well crafted and good fun.

The cars follow the same form as all the City F1 range but with the VCARB and Sauber livery. Axle elements are connected with plates and covered in SNOT brackets and slopes to create the shape of the bodywork. Printed elements form the rear wing and nose elements with slope-covered wheel arches mounted on each side to make the cockpit. The striking green and black of the Sauber is the more eye-catching of the pair and the accompanying driver is also the better looking. While the VCARB is a fair representation of the actual car, the constraints of the City format and the lack of sponsors do make it feel a little generic.

There's undoubtedly some fun to be had with the start line itself and while the inclusion of two cars in a set at this price is great, a more detailed backdrop may have resulted in a more satisfying set.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict
59
The inclusion of two cars in a low price set is great, but they come at the expense of the environment, resulting in a set with a disappointingly modest background.

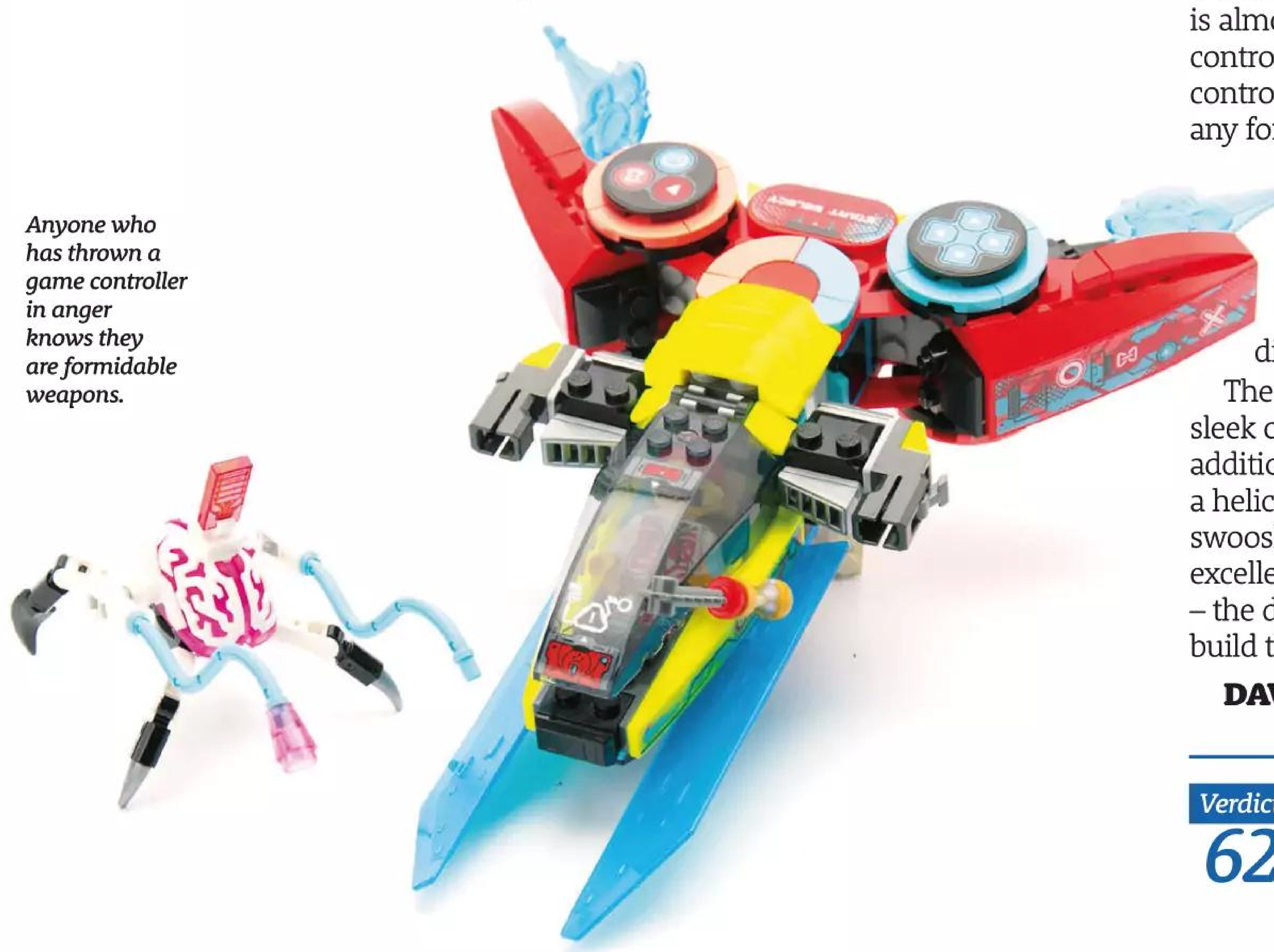


It's lightsout and away we go!

71489

Theme: *DREAMZzz /* ***Price:*** *£17.99, $19.99, €19.99 /*
Recommended age: *7+ /* ***Pieces:*** *266 /* ***Minifigures:*** *2*

Cooper's Gaming Controller Jet



Anyone who has thrown a game controller in anger knows they are formidable weapons.

A gaming theme sounds like a perfect match for DREAMZzz. The endlessly imaginative opportunities the theme offers align well with the video game world. This controller jet almost hits the mark, but doesn't quite fire on all cylinders.

The two builds are a jet or a helicopter, each using the same central core of a gaming controller. This sturdy red and blue construction is almost life-sized and reasonably emulates the look of an actual controller. Where it's less successful is in the finer details, notably the control pad. A D-pad and generic buttons are included, but they lack any form of interaction and are completely non-tactile.

A joystick or pressable buttons may have been preferable to the smooth surface presented here and sticker fans will be frustrated to learn that these aren't printed elements. Labels are used throughout to enhance the brightly-coloured elements, including the cockpit canopy and its heads-up display.

The eponymous jet is the better option of the two builds, with its sleek outline and use of blades to imply aggression and firepower, in addition to the stud shooters beside the cockpit. The alternate build of a helicopter is okay, but lacks the aggressive stance of the jet and loses swooshability as a result. The Cooper minifigure who pilots them looks excellent, with a neon blue shirt underneath a BUILT branded hoodie – the dual face print is a nice touch too. It's a colourful and imaginative build that fulfils the brief but doesn't excel.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict
62 A simple but sharp set that brings some vibrant colours to DREAMZzz – don't expect the details to impress though. Of the two options, the jet is better.

71490

Theme: *DREAMZzz /* ***Price:*** *£17.99, $19.99, €19.99 /*
Recommended age: *10+ /* ***Pieces:*** *252 /* ***Minifigures:*** *2*

Izzie and Bunchurro the Gaming Bunny

The neat thing about DREAMZzz is that the same character can be interpreted in different ways, because the whole concept behind the theme is about imagination and creativity.

71490 is a more stylised version of Bunchu than the version in 71453 Izzie and Bunchu the Bunny, but the concept is quite similar – it's an action figure sized take on the rabbit. The torso is really square, with a screen at the centre, then each limb is pretty much just one piece that leads to a hand or a foot. The trainers and gloves are quite neat, but the head is probably the most successful part of the character, with a decorated semi-circle surrounded by furry cheeks and two nicely formed ears.

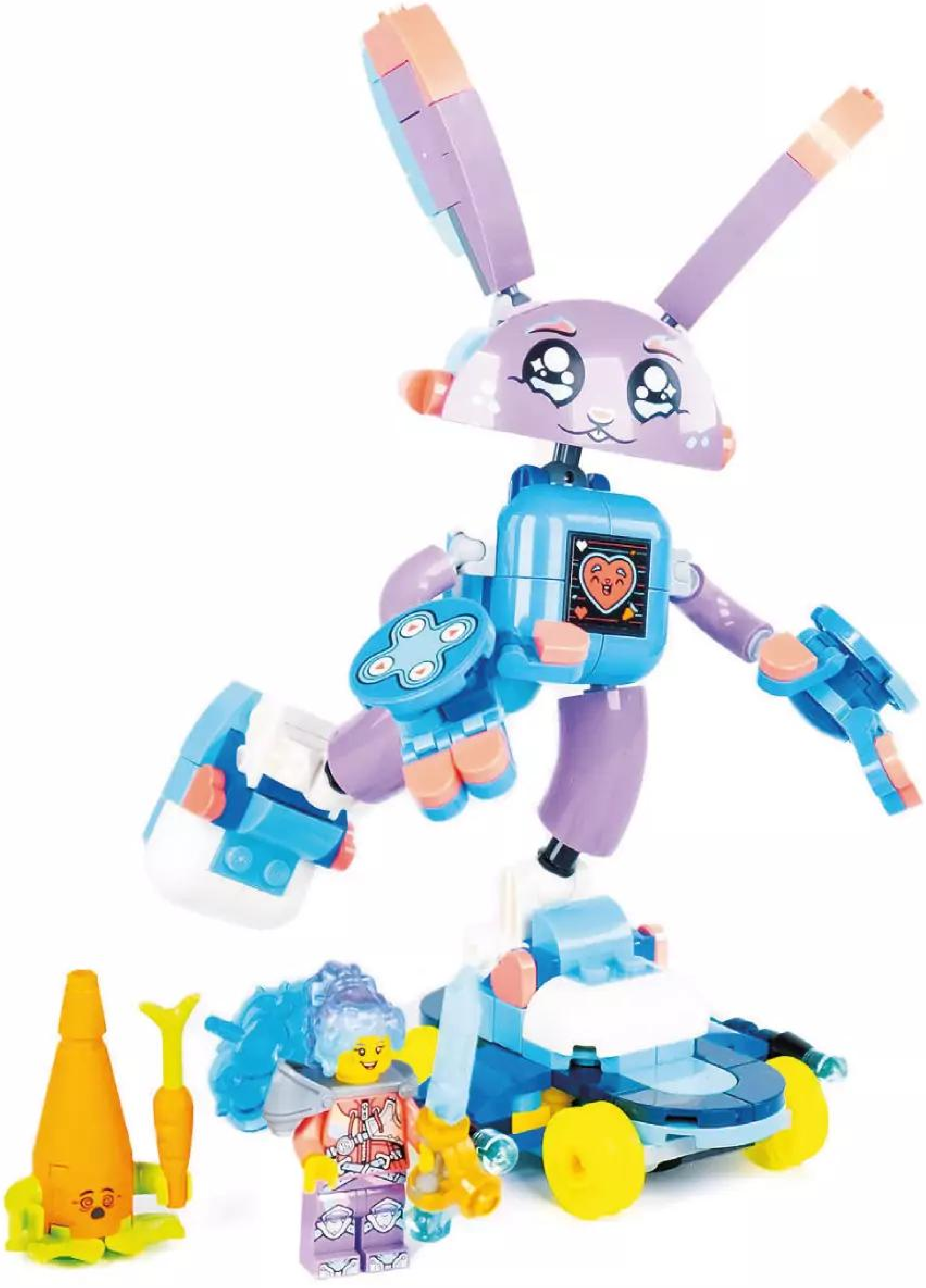
The back of the build is quite flat, so you need to admire it from the front. Hopefully a bigger version will come along soon and sculpt the character all the way around.

When you finish the main build, you have the full character – the dream craft options are for accessories, so you don't need to start taking the main model apart. The skateboard build suits the character a bit more than the jetpack, as the bandy legs are perfect for posing as if Bunchu is rolling along the street. Both are decent options though.

This version of Bunchu is fun, especially for the price, but if you just want one version of the character then you'll probably be better off with one of the non-gaming influenced options.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
57 This is a smile-inducing take on Bunchu – but the gaming angle is an acquired taste, so be sure you have considered all of the versions of this character.



Bunchu has gone digital.

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71497

Theme: *DREAMZzz* / ***Price:*** *£89.99, $99.99, €99.99* /
Recommended age: *9+* / ***Pieces:*** *1,006* / ***Minifigures:*** *6*

Cooper's Tiger Mech & Zero's Hot Rod Car

The third season of DREAMZzz has a cyber, technology-based look, which is reflected in many of the theme's recent sets. The largest of these, 71497 Cooper's Tiger Mech & Zero's Hot Rod Car crosses the animal aesthetic of Chima with NINJAGO's mech-building.

Cooper's red fighter is the base model for the set – it's a robust, solid ship and the new trans blue jet pieces certainly give the impressive that the ship can jet off at high speed. Cooper continues to get some of the larger, animal-themed DREAMZzz models and this is no exception – a few of the plate stickers on the fighter hint towards the mech's tiger theme. The printed headpiece has an arresting pair of techno-blue eyes, while the mech itself is very stable and it has a fair amount of articulation.

Rather unusually for a DREAMZzz set, moving between the two build options – the tiger mech and hot rod car or a racing car and robot wolf (the first option is the better one) – doesn't require the complete deconstruction of either model. Instead, both the tiger mech and robot wolf are largely made of the same units (both sets of limbs are built in the same way), with some additions to the hulls and bodies of the fighter and the hot rod car.

Although the box advertises two build options, at the back of the instruction manual there are ten pages of various ways the different modules can be combined, including a darker mech, which uses the wolf's intimidatingly angular head to great effect. This is certainly a welcome direction for the theme – the alternative build optionality has never felt sufficiently fluid when big changes are required, while simpler sets haven't had distinctive enough options.

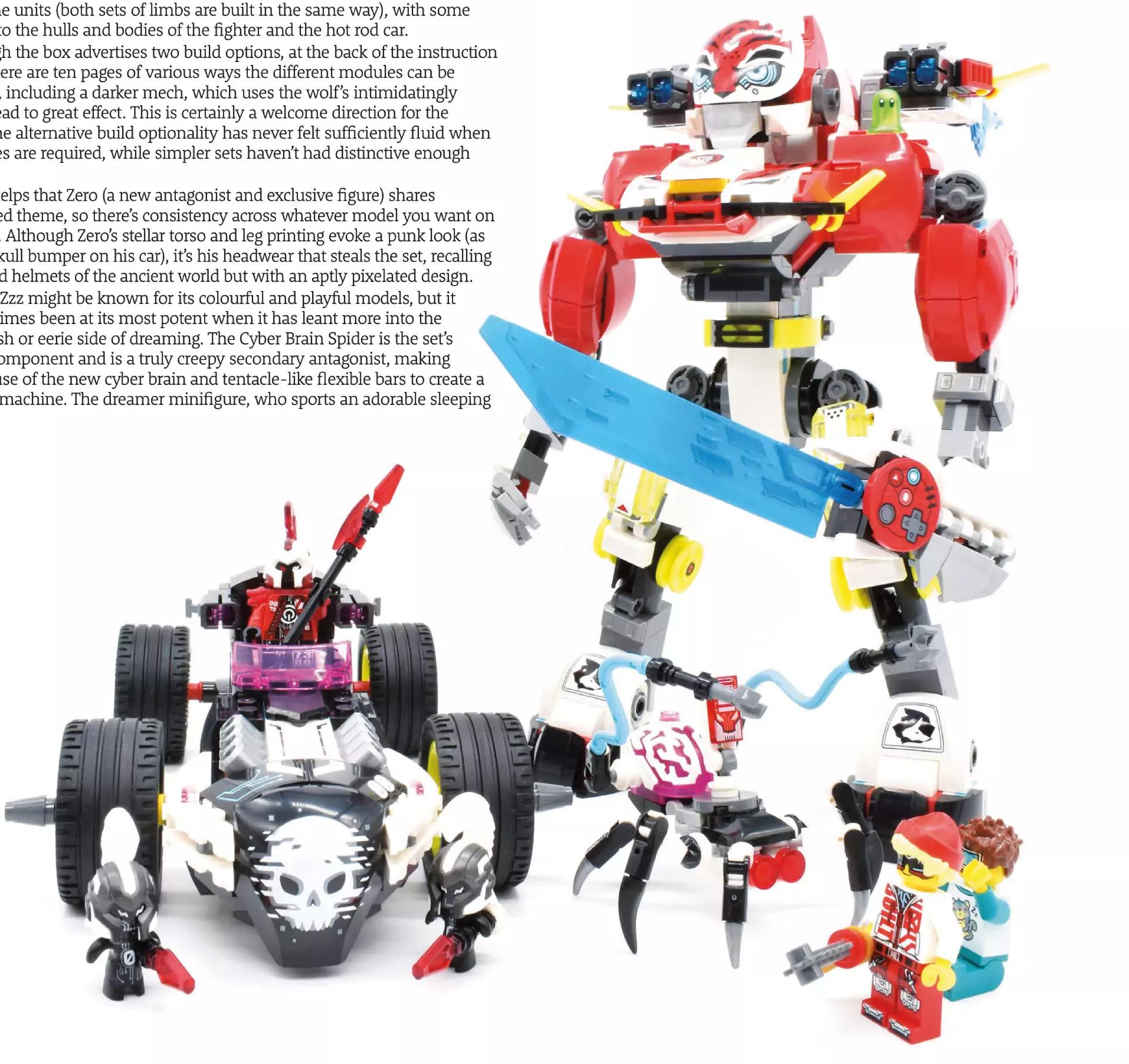
It also helps that Zero (a new antagonist and exclusive figure) shares Cooper's red theme, so there's consistency across whatever model you want on both sides. Although Zero's stellar torso and leg printing evoke a punk look (as does the skull bumper on his car), it's his headwear that steals the set, recalling the plumed helmets of the ancient world but with an aptly pixelated design.

DREAMZzz might be known for its colourful and playful models, but it has sometimes been at its most potent when it has leant more into the nightmarish or eerie side of dreaming. The Cyber Brain Spider is the set's smallest component and is a truly creepy secondary antagonist, making excellent use of the new cyber brain and tentacle-like flexible bars to create a predatory machine. The dreamer minifigure, who sports an adorable sleeping car torso print, should beware.

There's certainly lots of play to be had with this set and the theme's new focus on technology enables lots of exciting imaginative scenarios – perhaps Zero has sent a virus that corrupts Cooper's mech? 71497 is great for whatever story you want to tell, be it a race between Zero and Cooper or a battle for the digital age. With this much variety, this isn't one to miss.

ANTHONY WALKER-COOK

Verdict *69* **This set is packed with new pieces and knows exactly what to do with them. The modular design means that 71497 achieves complete imaginative play.**



The mech towers over Zero's car.

71491

Theme: *DREAMZzz* / ***Price:*** *£44.99, $49.99, €49.99* /
Recommended age: *8+* / ***Minifigures:*** *2* / ***Pieces:*** *485*

Mateo and the Z-Blob Action Race Car

Let's hope you like neon. LEGO DREAMZzz has delivered this bright, eye-catching vehicle in garish, luminescent colours from top to bottom. This modular vehicle embraces the gaming theme of this DREAMZzz wave to a less noticeable extent than 71489 Cooper's Gaming Controller Jet, but with a stronger result.

The first thing that is immediately noticeable and impossible to ignore is the colour palette. Multiple recoloured and new elements in transparent neon green and yellow are scatted across the entire build, mixing three core colours around each of the vehicle's main components. The process begins with the cockpit – a self-contained unit with plenty of connection points for later elements to bolt onto.

A gaming controller is used inside the cockpit to direct the car and the canopy is decorated with stickers to good effect. A brick-built game controller is located directly behind the cockpit and it doubles as a flying weapons array, holding two rotating stud shooters. This subassembly is securely clipped onto bars behind the cockpit, making removing and reconfiguring easy without having to rebuild the entire vehicle.

With the cockpit complete, you can choose to build either a race car or a bike. Both builds have a lot of similarities and, thankfully, don't attempt to change the formula so much that either model is compromised. The car is the most striking of the two due to the visual impact that the brightly coloured wheels have and the forward rake that the axles create, but the bike is impressively stable and feels a little more compact and enclosed.

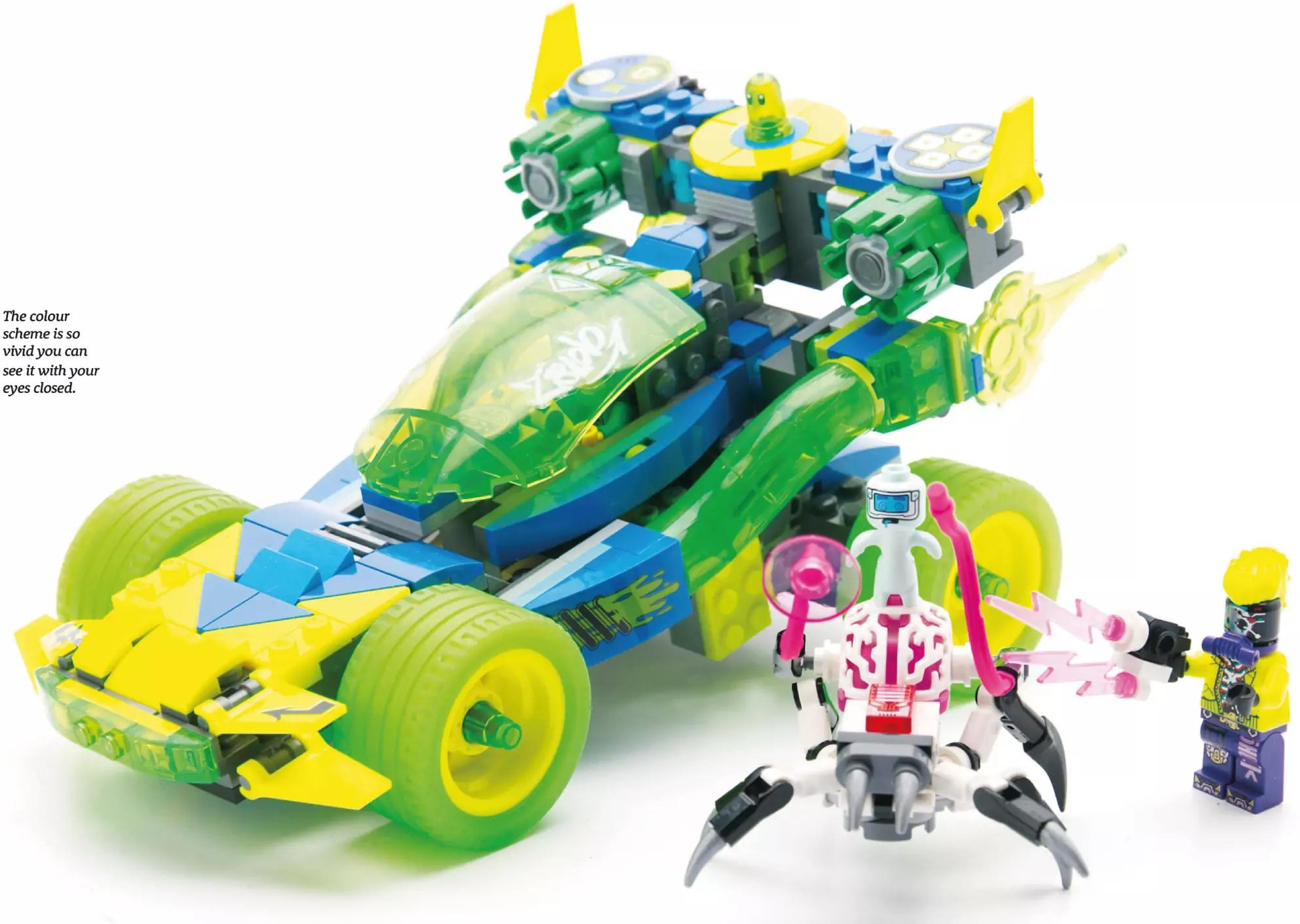
The bike also has the benefit of being prettier from all angles, while the car has an undoubtedly better visual impact from the front perspective – the rear and some side angles can feel a little unfinished. This is especially noticeable where dark grey plates or Technic beams are visible underneath the neon bodywork. While this could be considered some kind of scaffolding or armoured substructure, it lacks finesse. Both vehicle modes suffer from this to a degree, but the bike hides it slightly better.

Mateo, one of the two exclusive minifigures in the set, pilots the car or bike. Sporting a black shirt and blue jacket, his torso, hair and face print feature a generous splat of green goo and all of them are highly detailed and attractive. His leg print is exceptional, a stunning mix of intricate silver details with a halftone pattern and bright red boots. Battling him is D-Shock, who is equally appealing in a bright neon yellow jacket, with a neon hair element and purple legs. Both come armed with wildly oversized and cool-looking weapons that complement them well.

Last but not least, the disturbing Cyber Brain Spider uses new flexible pipe elements and a specialised brain-shaped brick to complete its freakish looks. There's plenty here for even the most casual DREAMZzz fan to enjoy, especially the plethora of interesting new elements.

DAVE CARTLIDGE

Verdict
67
Bright, bold and bonkers fun, this pair of garishly coloured vehicles is elevated by a pair of ridiculously fun new minifigures.



The colour scheme is so vivid you can see it with your eyes closed.

71485

Theme: *DREAMZzz /* ***Price:*** *£114.99, $129.99, €129.99 /*
Recommended age: *10+ /* ***Minifigures:*** *6 /* ***Pieces:*** *1,333*

Mateo and Z-Blob the Knight Battle Mech

Mateo's blob of goo can become a towering knight mech with sword and shield, a four-legged steed or a truly wacky robot – it can only be DREAMZzzz

The core of this model is a sci-fi pod with room for a minifigure or two to sit inside. It's futuristic and Z-Blob themed, as in the DREAMZzz story it has been dream crafted by Mateo. It's quick to build and effectively uses a lot of SNOT to give it a nice, rounded shape.

In the instruction book's story, the Never Witch's raven is stealing Castle Nocturnia and Mateo dream crafts the pod into one of three machines as a response – the core model, as shown on the box, is the enormous Z-Blob knight.

The set is a very modular build, with each little section constructed and then added to the main model. Each module is built as an intricate assembly, then after you have clipped it to the main body you use larger cladding pieces to cover it. This gives the finished model a clean, modern look rather than the more typical LEGO System industrial look.

It's a heck of a toy you end up with. Although strictly speaking this is some sort of vehicle for Mateo, it's just like a massive action figure. Even to an adult hand this is chunky, so to a child it must seem absolutely enormous. The colour scheme is fantastic, with blue and green providing some nice, vibrant hues on the dominant white.

By now, LEGO fans know not to expect much articulation from mechs – the design team has found that children don't like knee and foot joints because it makes it hard for them to pose the model. They would rather just be able to slam it down and have it stand. That means as an adult though it is quite frustrating that the only pose you can have is quite a static one.

That isn't just an issue for the legs, but the arms as well. There are shoulder and wrist joints, but no elbow joints. Elbow joints would really help get some more dynamic poses out of Z-Blob. There is limited neck articulation, which is a shame as having more ways to position the head would help.

What's clever about the set is the way that it includes all of the aspects of a knight, but delivers them in a techy, mech sort of way. The mech's head, for example, is shaped like a knight's helmet, while the green goo sword and shield give the figure archetypal weapons.

The centaur build is a bit more awkward than the knight. Something about the form and some of the part uses (such as the NEXO shields on the lance) just aren't as convincing. It's still a fun enough toy, it just lacks the polish of the hero model.

By contrast, the squat robot (a 'street battle mech' according to the official description) looks great, with a nice futuristic vibe. It lacks the overall presence of the knight, but is still a fun model. Bizarrely, for this version you need to add two stickers to the green canopy element to give the mech eyes – but the knight version doesn't have you add those stickers. If you want to rebuild back and forth, that's a problem (pro tip: buy an extra of that part so you can have it both ways).

Broadly the stickers on the set are fine, as they provide much needed pizazz to the builds. There are also two printed elements and it's a relief not to have to apply a sticker to something as essential as Z-Blob knight's face.

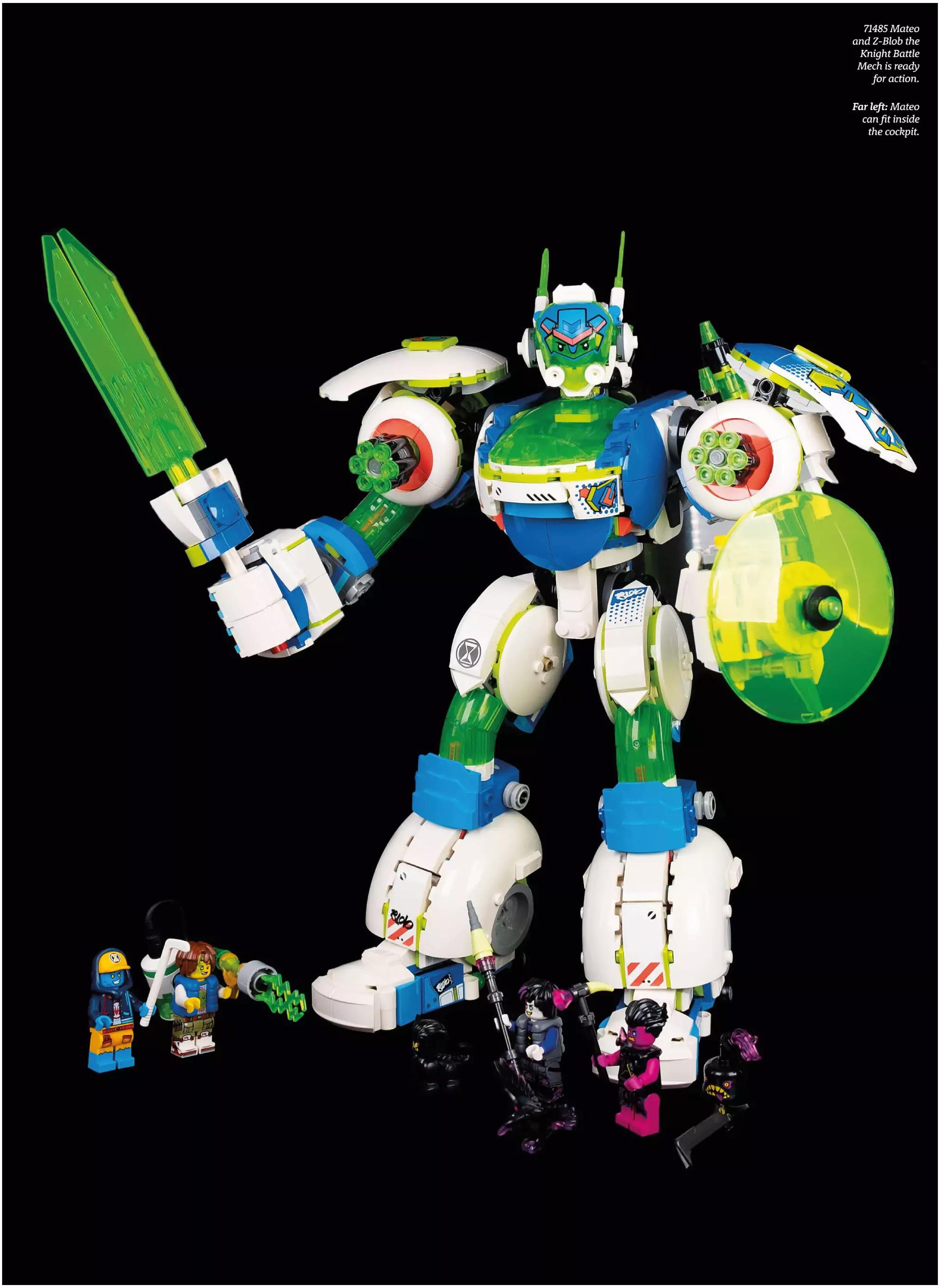
Mateo and Logan both have excellent accessories. In the case of Mateo, he has the gilet element with a stud on the back – this means that the green goo canister that powers his dream tool can be attached to him. Logan has a unique baseball cap and hood combo that looks great and goes really well with his torso.

The villainous doppelgangers are brilliantly designed, presenting the characters that fans have come to know but with a dark twist. The nightmare pencil accessory is a particularly fun brick-built weapon.

This is a really decent mech and thanks to its size has nice presence on display. Visually it's really neat and cohesive, a distinct and fun looking figure in and of itself, but also very fitting within the DREAMZzz universe as it has been established. It would look even better though if you could get some dynamic poses out of it, but it can basically stand the same way an action figure could in the 1980s.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
67
Z-Blob looks excellent as a mechanoid knight, but would look even better if the model was more posable. One of the alternate builds is great, while the other is average.



71485 Mateo and Z-Blob the Knight Battle Mech is ready for action.

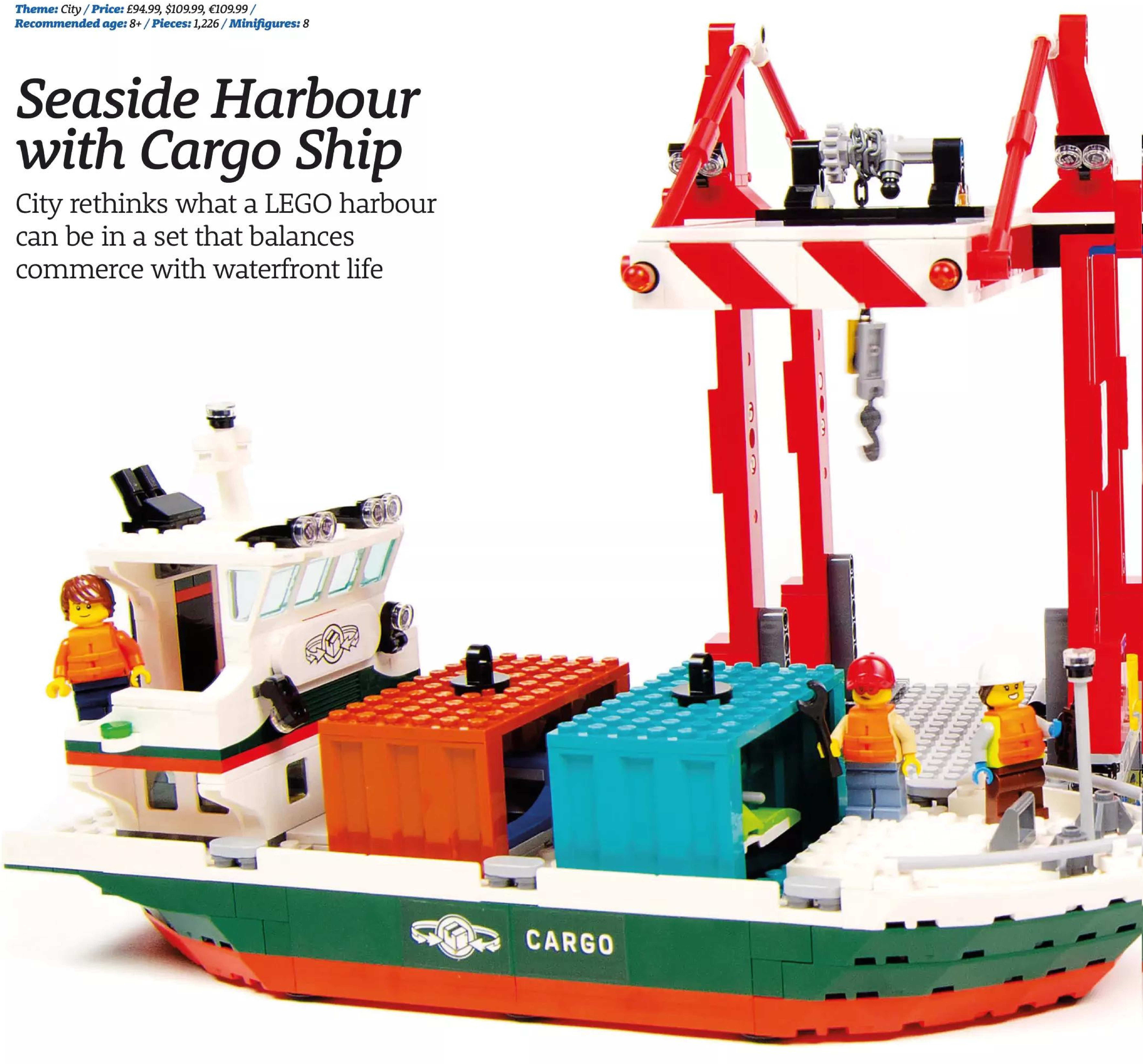
Far left: *Mateo can fit inside the cockpit.*

60422

Theme: City / **Price:** £94.99, $109.99, €109.99 /
Recommended age: 8+ / **Pieces:** 1,226 / **Minifigures:** 8

Seaside Harbour with Cargo Ship

City rethinks what a LEGO harbour can be in a set that balances commerce with waterfront life



Since the advent of the minifigure back in 1978, there have been, including 60422 Seaside Harbour with Cargo Ship, only five LEGO harbour sets. The last one was released so long ago that its product number only has four digits – 4645 Harbour from 2011. The chance to get a LEGO harbour seems to only come along once in a decade – but scarcity does not automatically equal quality, so can 60422 Seaside Harbour with Cargo Ship demand your attention on its merits?

The set is made up of three main components – a cargo ship, a crane and a pier with restaurant. The crane is 60422's most visually commanding feature. Constructed in bright red it, stands out for breaking from previous iterations to give a proper sliding cargo crane, as seen in seaports all over the world. This type of crane has not been offered in a LEGO port set since the original, 6542 Launch & Load Seaport in 1991.

Four supports lift it high above the pier. From that perch, a winch can raise and lower the hook to lift cargo from the boat. The crane is tall, sturdy and has some interesting build features, most notably the diagonal supports that are angled in a way not normally seen in LEGO sets.

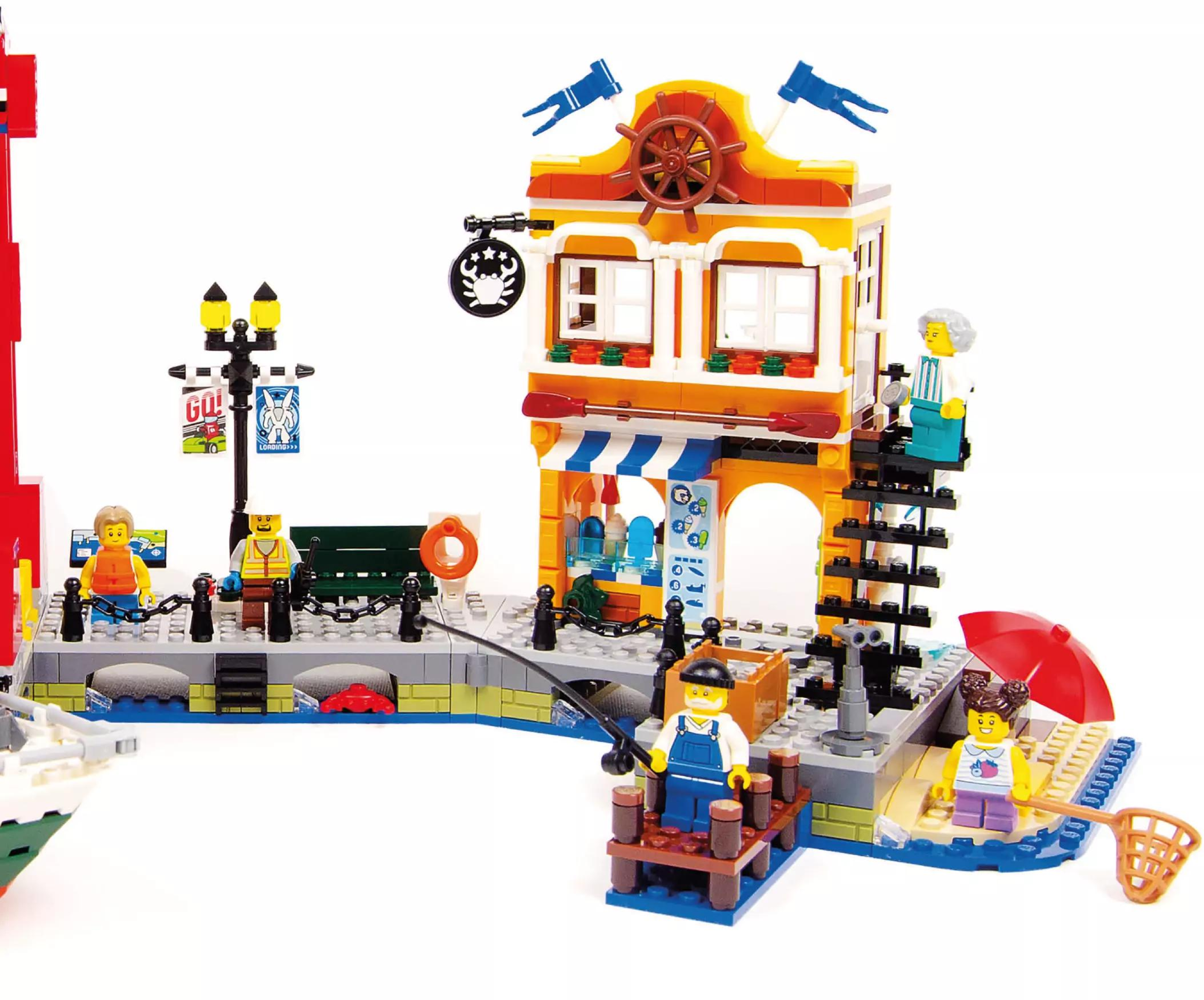
There is an issue though – where does the cargo go after being unloaded? All previous LEGO harbour sets have included a truck and loading area. Here they must simply be plopped down on the pier, with no connection to a roadway. If you are looking to incorporate this model into a larger layout, you have some work to do.

That crane section connects to the rest of the pier. Model designers have done a lovely job with this area, building it out with far more detail than any previous harbour set. It feels like a place minifigures will want to visit, as there are benches, a map of the pier, fishing areas, a shower and lots of lovely details like tyres hanging on chains and a beach with umbrella. These inclusions add a lot of richness to the set.

This feels like an actual boardwalk found by the sea. There is a lot to do and see, especially at the end of the pier where the restaurant sits. This two-storey structure is built with a striking combination of colours and packs a lot of unique architectural features into its small footprint.

The bottom floor houses an ice cream stop and equipment rental shop, while the top floor is filled by a crab restaurant – or at least a sitting area to eat crabs since there is no kitchen. Including a civilian establishment in addition to the harbour expands the appeal of this set and make it a more

This harbour set depicts a whole pier, not just the shipping terminal.



striking display piece. It's also a unique type of building, as the LEGO Group has not offered an authentic looking seafood restaurant before.

A small complaint is that to fit so much in, a lot of compromises have been made. For example, the boats that can be rented are the same ones that are in the cargo containers. The top floor of the restaurant leaves a lot to the imagination, as just a single sitting area is actually included. The designers have cleverly stretched things out to maximise the value the set offers, but it's clear that in certain areas some additional elements could have helped.

Finally, there is the main event – the cargo ship itself. Unlike the past two harbour sets, this boat is brick built and does not use a huge, moulded hull element. At the ship's rear there is a two-storey structure. Continuing in the tradition of previous boats, the bottom level is devoted to an engine room, while the top floor houses the bridge and ship's wheel.

The middle of the ship is devoted to storing two cargo containers, both of which contain a small boat. One of them, the blue racing boat, is a reference to 6508 Wave Racer from 1990. Finally, the front of the ship contains a small, covered cargo area accessed via a trap door element on the deck. The boat is highly detailed and has a lot of great colours – the only drawback is its size.

While not without precedent, the ships from past harbour sets have all been larger – and in some cases much larger. The lack of deck space and cargo containers to fill it feels like a missed opportunity as these types of ships always look overloaded in real life. Fans could opt to size up the included boat – or if you prefer old school Town, it's probably as big as you want it to be.

Small complaints aside, 60422 Seaside Harbour with Cargo Ship lives up to its name. Instead of being just about living a shipping magnate's fantasy in brick form, it expands upon the past formula to include a variety of civilian aspects that make the set much richer.

As a complete package, this is a really solid set that doesn't waste a single brick.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI

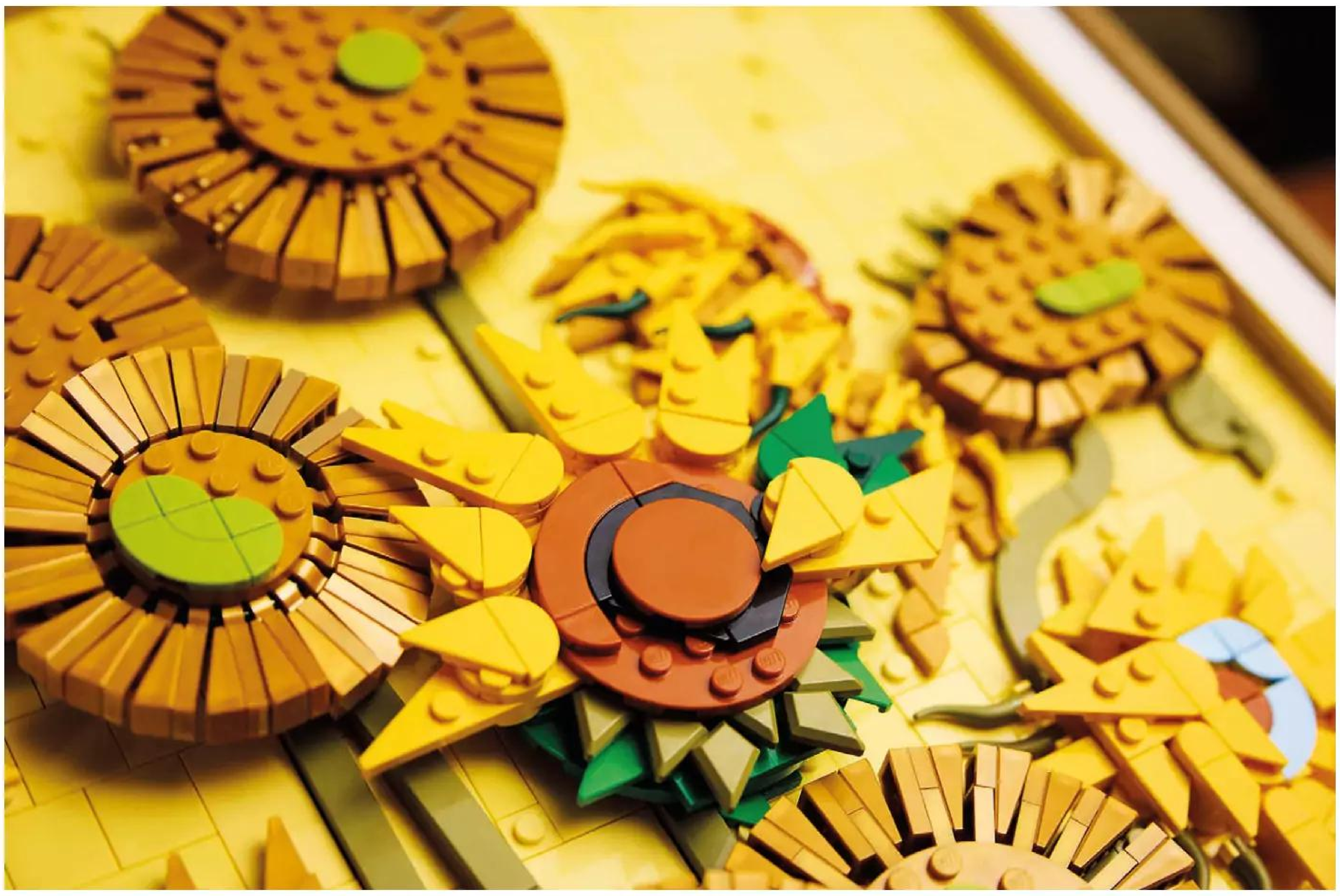
Verdict **72** **Everything you need for a satisfying harbour is here, including an entirely brick-built ship and a compact seafood restaurant. Take the opportunity to get a seaport before it retires.**

31215

Theme: *Art* / ***Price:*** *£169.99, $199.99, €199.99* /
Recommended age: *18+* / ***Pieces:*** *2,615* / ***Minifigures:*** *0*

Vincent van Gogh – Sunflowers

A world famous piece of art is realised using LEGO pieces. Is this fresh take on the iconic painting one to hang on the wall?



World famous artist Vincent Van Gogh's best known painting is Sunflowers and the LEGO Group has tackled the iconic image in this Art set, showing a growing confidence within the design team. Given that Van Gogh painted it in 1889, it's quite incredible to think that it is still providing inspiration to people today.

Using just three shades of yellow, Van Gogh was testing how he could play with colour and work with limitations. The painting shows the life of sunflowers, as it includes young buds, open flowers and wilting blooms.

The beginning of the build is not particularly inspiring. You start with a frame for the picture – it's not completely unenjoyable, but when you open a LEGO box to build a set based on a world-famous artwork, you expect to start with something more compelling than putting a massive rectangular shape together.

Once you have constructed the frame and set it aside, it is time to put the painting itself together. The canvas grows as you build the model, with each small section built on plates that then attach to the main structure.

Although better than the frame, this is another dull aspect of the build process. When you see the box for this set or see the model from a distance, you will notice that there is dimensionality to it. As you construct it though, it becomes clear that the vast majority of the build involves placing tiles down on plates.

There's nothing groundbreaking about taking plate after plate and then following the pattern to cover it with tiles. That said, it is a very pacey part of the build and when you get into a nice rhythm it can be very satisfying, as the picture grows rapidly.

As you tile these plates, you add them to the main construct until it is complete. Then there's an odd bit of building that has you putting together the same sort of sections, but on one thin section of plates. You then add it to the rest of the model using Technic pins – it represents the way Van Gogh extended his painting in real life. This subtle storytelling is a lovely touch.

You would hope that completing the flat part of the build would mean a more enjoyable end to the model, but the build actually goes from as basic as can be to frustratingly fiddly. Clipping petal after petal together gets old quickly, although the technique is effective for crafting the flowers.

Just like other Art sets, there's a special element on the back that allows you to hang the picture on a wall. The frame is quite wide, so if you don't have a spot to hang it then it can probably be propped up somewhere with little risk of damage.

As for how it compares to the actual artwork, it's very much an abstraction. The fine detailed brushstrokes are of course absent, as the LEGO adaptation juxtaposes the colours and composition of the painting with the harsh, jagged lines of LEGO elements – it almost becomes its own piece of art. The route the designers went down is effective, it looks really interesting and definitely holds your gaze.

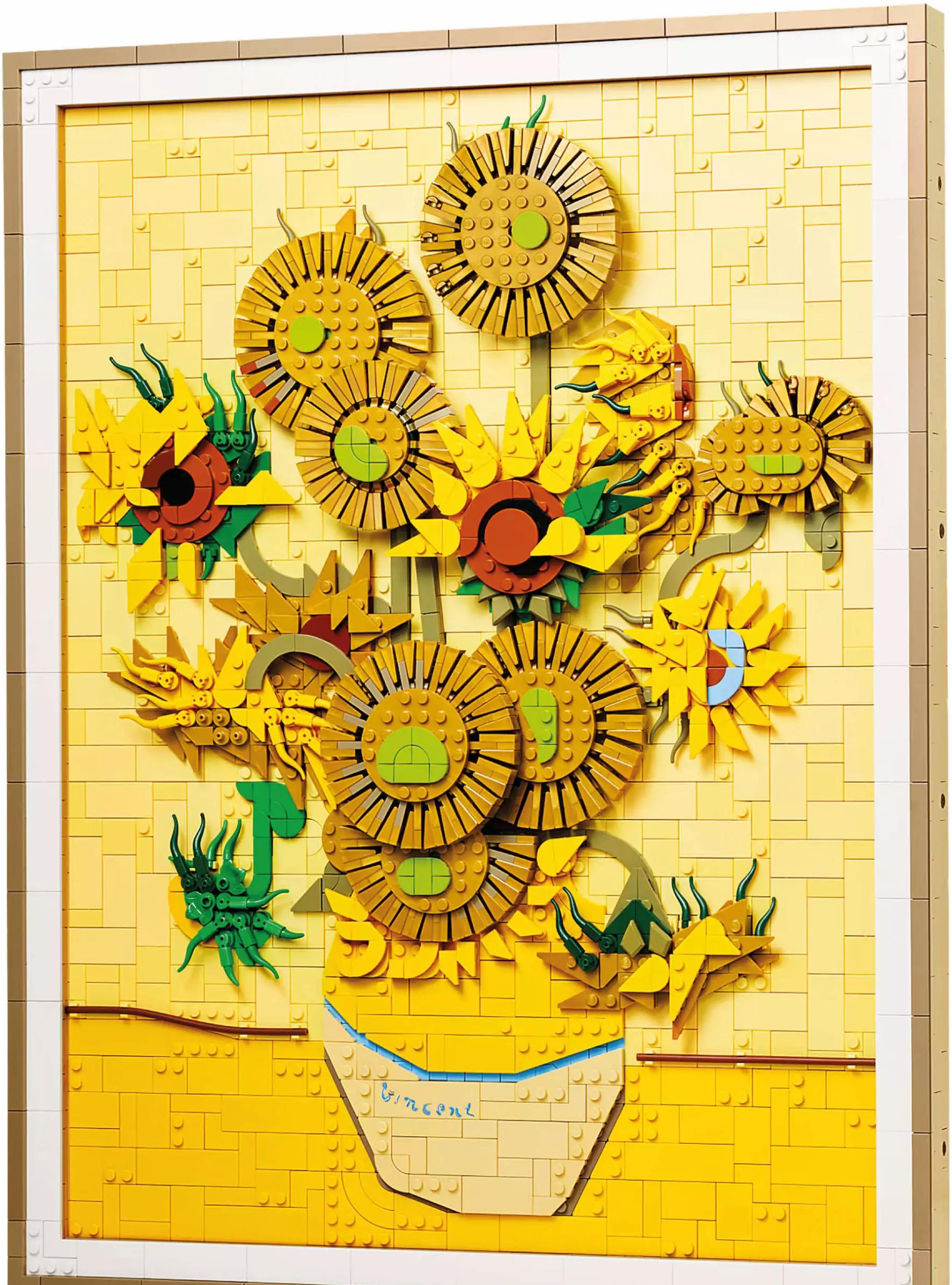
Bright yellow, warm gold and sand yellow come together nicely to provide a really distinct and enjoyable colour palette. It's really impressive how close these colours are to those in the actual piece, especially considering that the LEGO Group has a limited range of hues to choose from.

The set is not quite as appealing as 21333 Vincent van Gogh – The Starry Night. That 2022 LEGO Ideas set has much more dimension to it, with the picture coming further out of the frame. Although 21333 also has a lot of repetitive building for the backdrop, it is also a much more interesting set to put together overall.

If you love art, love LEGO decoration or are really fascinated by Vincent Van Gogh, it may well be worth getting this set. You should be aware though that the build is not the most interesting, switching from super basic to rather fiddly very quickly, with neither providing as much satisfaction as you would hope.

GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

Verdict
68
An impressive, uniquely LEGO System take on Van Gogh's Sunflowers has its own beauty. Getting to the end point is a bit of a slog though.



Left: *The base is flat, but then you attach brick-built flowers to it.*

Right: *The LEGO Group collaborated on the set with the Van Gogh Museum.*

90-100	*An exceptional set that does something special, original or innovative.*
80-90	*A top tier LEGO set that is close to perfect, showing what the System can do.*
70-80	*Strongly recommended, a very good LEGO set providing a really enjoyable build.*
60-70	*A decent set that will offer a satisfying experience, but may have a few flaws.*
50-60	*Still recommended by Blocks, but expect an average and pedestrian build.*
40-50	*Perhaps worth buying, but a set that falls below the usual high LEGO standards.*
25-40	*A disappointing set that might have some redeeming qualities.*
1-25	*A set that's only for the dedicated collectors; there are many better options.*

REVIEWED **THIS MONTH**

SET	THEME	SCORE
10353 Williams Racing FW14B & Nigel Mansell	Icons	88
77242 Ferrari SF-24 F1	Speed Champions	84
77243 Oracle Red Bull Racing RB20 F1	Speed Champions	87
77244 Mercedes-AMG F1 W15	Speed Champions	82
77245 Aston Martin Aramco F1 AMR24	Speed Champions	69
77246 Visa Cash App RB VCARB 01 F1	Speed Champions	78
77247 KICK Sauber F1 Team C44	Speed Champions	76
77248 BWT Alpine F1 Team A524	Speed Champions	71
77249 Williams Racing FW46 F1	Speed Champions	78
77250 MoneyGram Haas F1 Team VF-24	Speed Champions	79
77251 McLaren F1 Team MCL38	Speed Champions	90
60474 F1 Grid with VCARB & Sauber Race Cars	City	59
71489 Cooper's Gaming Controller Jet	DREAMZzz	62
71490 Izzie and Bunchurro the Gaming Bunny	DREAMZzz	57
71497 Cooper's Tiger Mech & Zero's Hot Rod Car	DREAMZzz	69
71491 Mateo and the Z-Blob Action Race Car	DREAMZzz	67
71485 Mateo and Z-Blob the Knight Battle Mech	DREAMZzz	67
60422 Seaside Harbour with Cargo Ship	City	72
31215 Vincent van Gogh – Sunflowers	Art	68

Buy these sets
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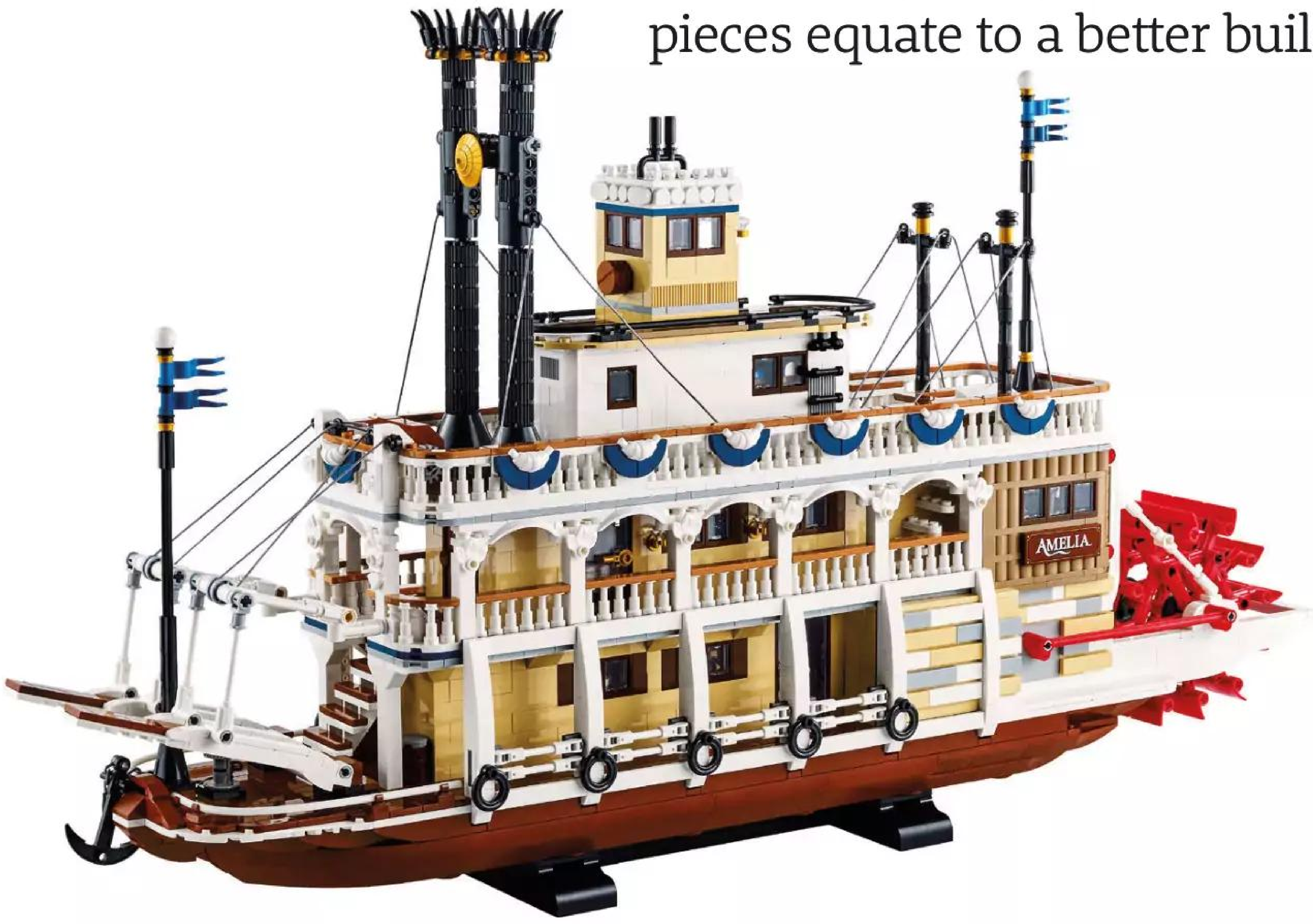
NEXT MONTH

21356 River Steamboat is the largest Ideas set yet – Blocks takes a look to see if more pieces equate to a better build.



AT BLOCKSMAG.COM

40761 The Lord of the Rings: Sméagol & Déagol depicts a flashback scene... does it deliver a desirable slice of Middle-earth?

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5

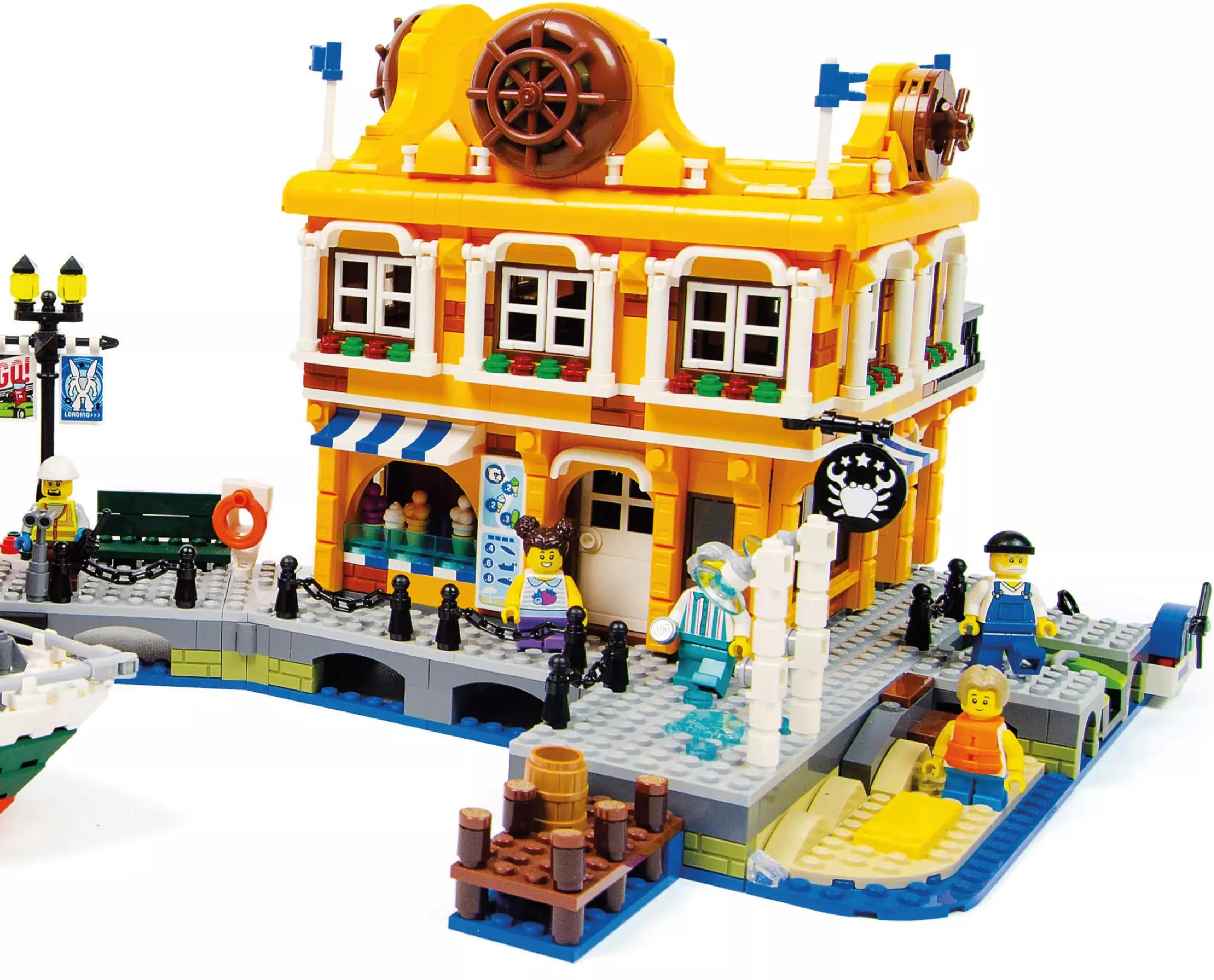
TO WIN THE NEW WILLIAMS FW14B

Subscribe to Blocks magazine today to be in with a chance of winning **10353 WILLIAMS RACING FW14B & NIGEL MANSELL** One lucky subscriber will be drawn at random to win the set.

Everyone who subscribes to Blocks by **June 5, 2025** will gain entry into the next and all subsequent **monthly** draws. Existing subscribers will also be automatically entered into every draw. Good luck!

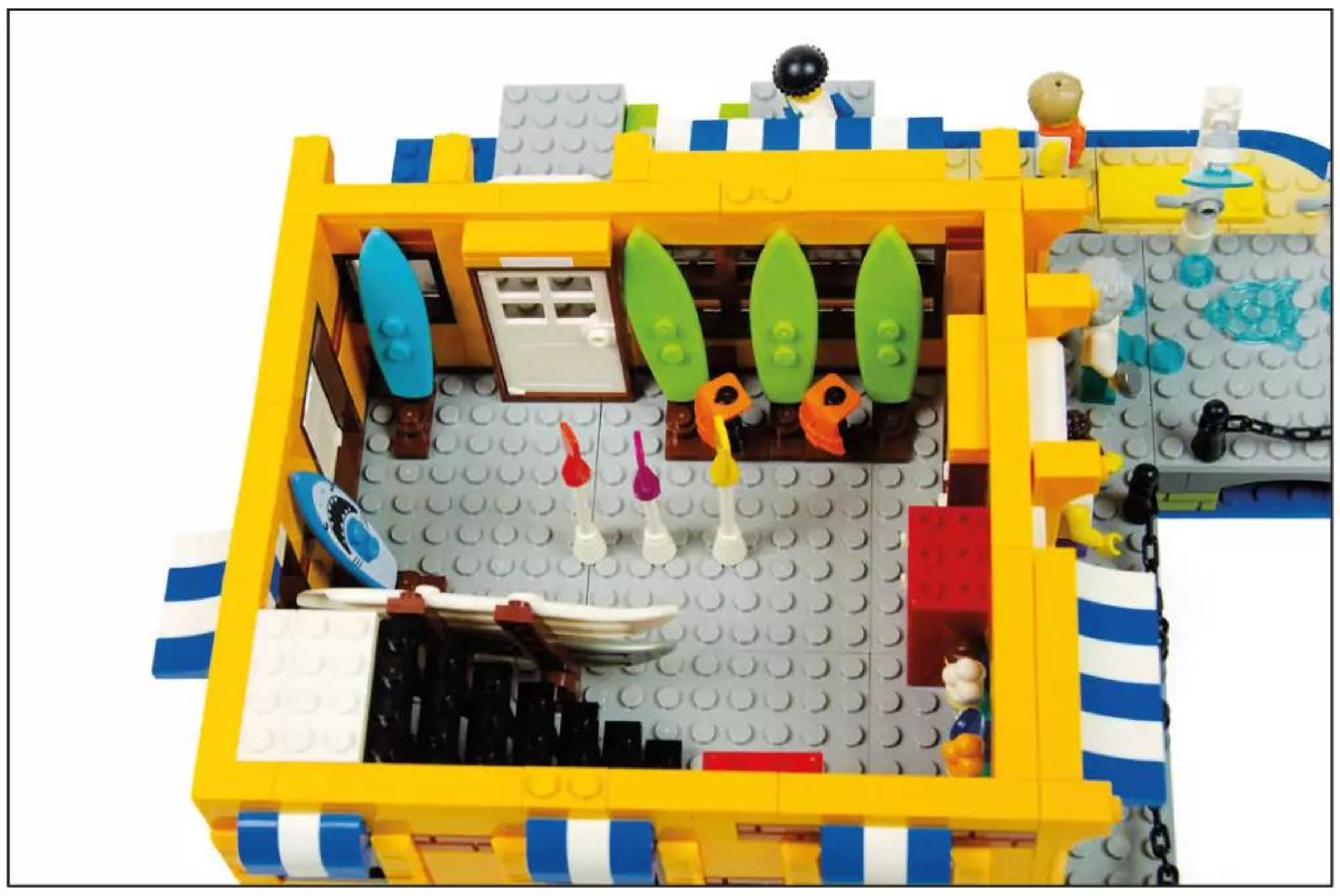
This competition is open to anyone who subscribes to a Blocks Magazine subscription, except employees of the Promoter, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the Promotion. Each participant can only enter once during the Promotion Period. The competition will be open from 9.00am (BST) on April 30, 2025 to 5:00pm June 5, 2025 (the "Promotion Period"). Any entries outside of the Promotion Period will not be counted. One overall competition winner will be chosen by the Publisher of Blocks Magazine. The decision of the Promoter in relation to the Promotion is final. No correspondence will be entered into. No information regarding entries or judging will be disclosed to any third party not involved in the conduct of the Promotion. The prize is not transferable, re-saleable or exchangeable. There is no cash alternative. The promoter reserves the right to substitute any of the prize products subject to availability. Winners will be announced in a future issue of Blocks magazine and on our social media pages. Winners must respond to notification of their prize within 48 hours otherwise the right to claim the prize will be lost and the promoter reserves the right to re-award the prize(s). No entries from agents, third parties, organised groups or applications automatically generated by computers will be accepted. No incomplete or corrupted entries will be accepted. Any entries not in accordance with the entry instructions will be rejected. Any entries containing offensive or inappropriate content will be removed. By entering participants will be deemed to have accepted and be bound by the rules. All entry instructions form part of these Terms and Conditions. In the event of unforeseen circumstances the Promoters reserve the right to offer alternative prizes of equal or greater value. The Promoter reserves the right to amend, alter or terminate this promotion at any time due to circumstances beyond its control. The Promoter's decision is final and binding in all matters relating to the promotion. The Promoter can accept no responsibility for, and reserves the right to refuse, entries which are corrupt, incomplete or fail to arrive by the closing date. These rules are governed by English law and subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the English Courts. Promoter & Data Controller: Silverback Publishing Ltd

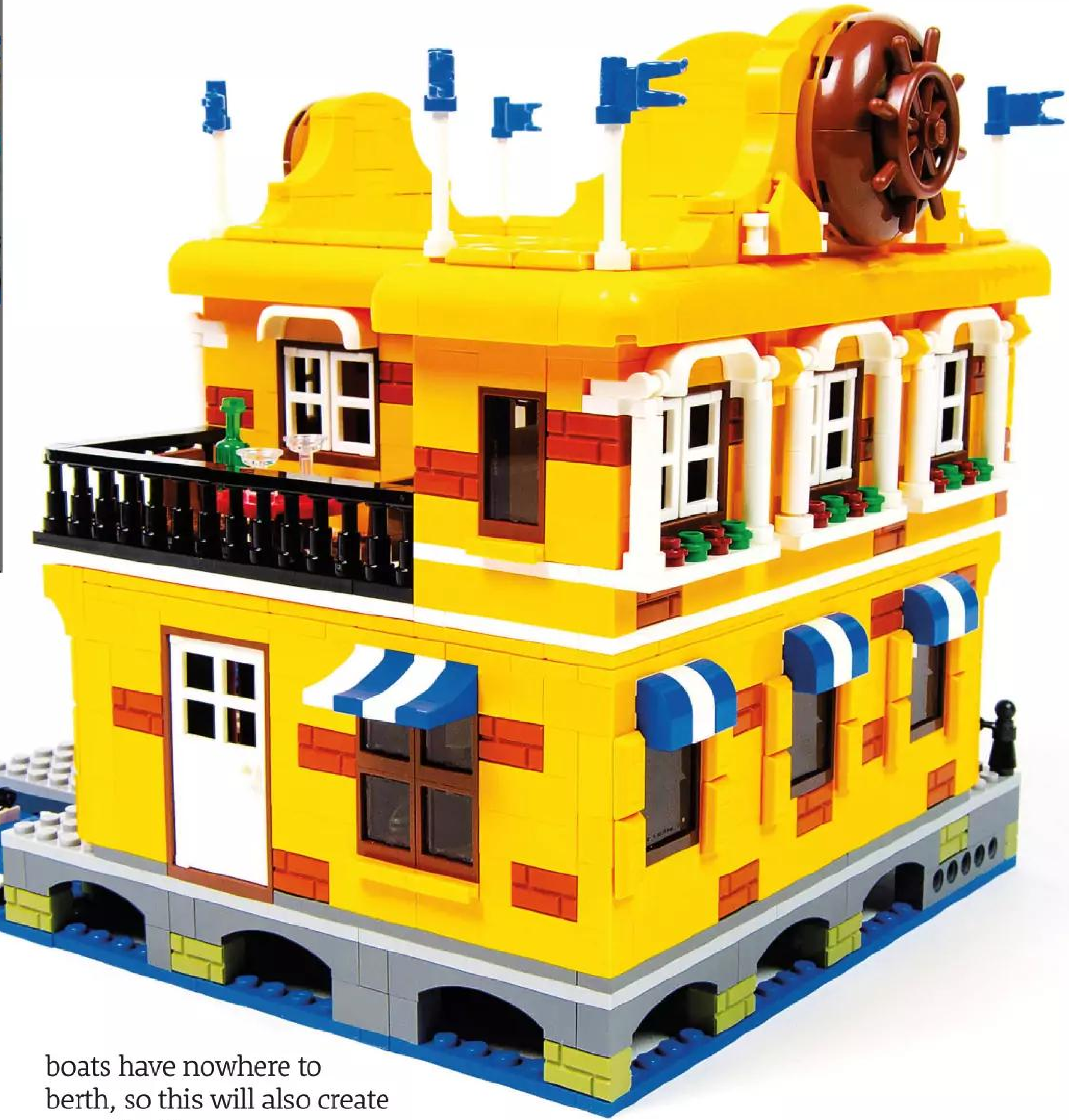
Seafood Restaurant



Watch the waves move back and forth as you enjoy a cosy dining experience. The freshest seafood is served at this establishment and it's clearly in demand – after all, it has expanded to offer diners a full four walls

Words: *Daniel Konstanski*





City 60422 Seaside Harbour with Cargo Ship offers a waterfront location, combining the commercial imperative of a harbour with the more relaxing aspects of a pier. Its harbour section features an industrial crane capable of unloading the included cargo ship. There have been multiple harbour models that have focused on that, content to depict just the dock area.

This model goes further though and extends the pier to include a recreational area reminiscent of boardwalks found in seaside towns. Minifigures can discover a surf shop, ice cream stand and restaurant. The seafood restaurant stands out because City has never offered one before.

Unfortunately, it's pretty much just a façade. A very attractive façade though, as there are several aspects that make it clear what sort of establishment it is; there are ornate window frames, a vibrant colour scheme and a ship's wheel at the top.

This project's main aim is to complete the building so that it becomes a full restaurant on the top floor and a full surf shop on the ground floor. Because the colour scheme works so well, it seeks to retain that from the official set while adding to it where appropriate. In the official set, the surf shop's rental boats have nowhere to berth, so this will also create space for them.

Finding a scale is essential in a build like this, as the building cannot go so large that it makes the crane look small. That means that the restaurant gets a decent footprint, expanding further back from the water's edge, but doesn't go much taller.

60422 elevates the pier using a combination of arches and masonry brick elements in olive green. This formula is easy to expand, so the pier extends in multiple directions to form the foundation for the larger restaurant. A pair of small piers are built into this new area so that the boats have a berth where they can be docked when they are not in use. Following the set's colour scheme means that everything blends together effectively.

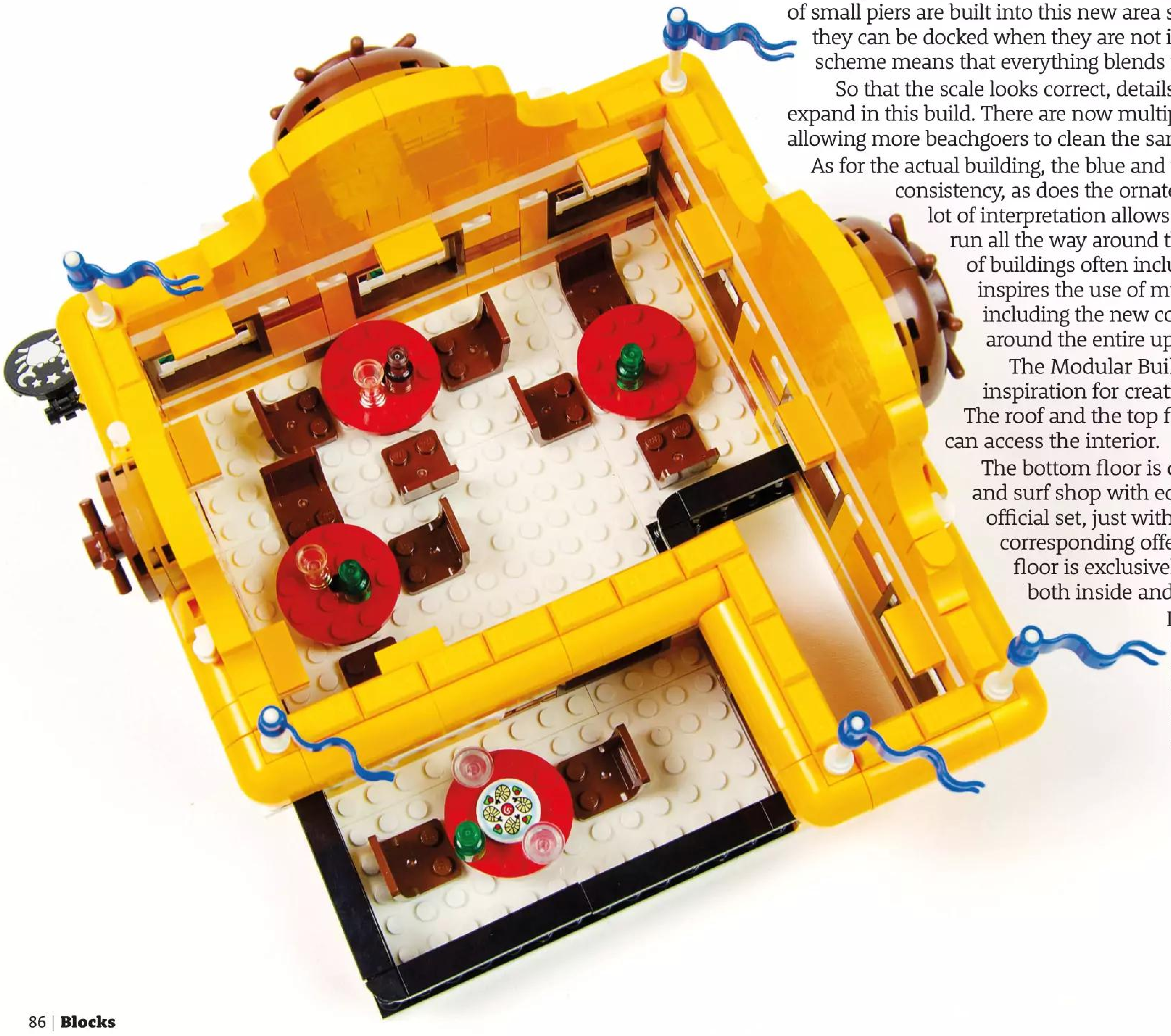
So that the scale looks correct, details and features from the original set expand in this build. There are now multiple showers instead of just the one, allowing more beachgoers to clean the sand off their feet.

As for the actual building, the blue and white awning continues for consistency, as does the ornate decoration around the windows. A lot of interpretation allows the small roofline to expand and run all the way around the top of the structure. These types of buildings often include curved ornamentation, which inspires the use of multiple curved slope elements including the new corner variant for a seamless awning around the entire upper perimeter.

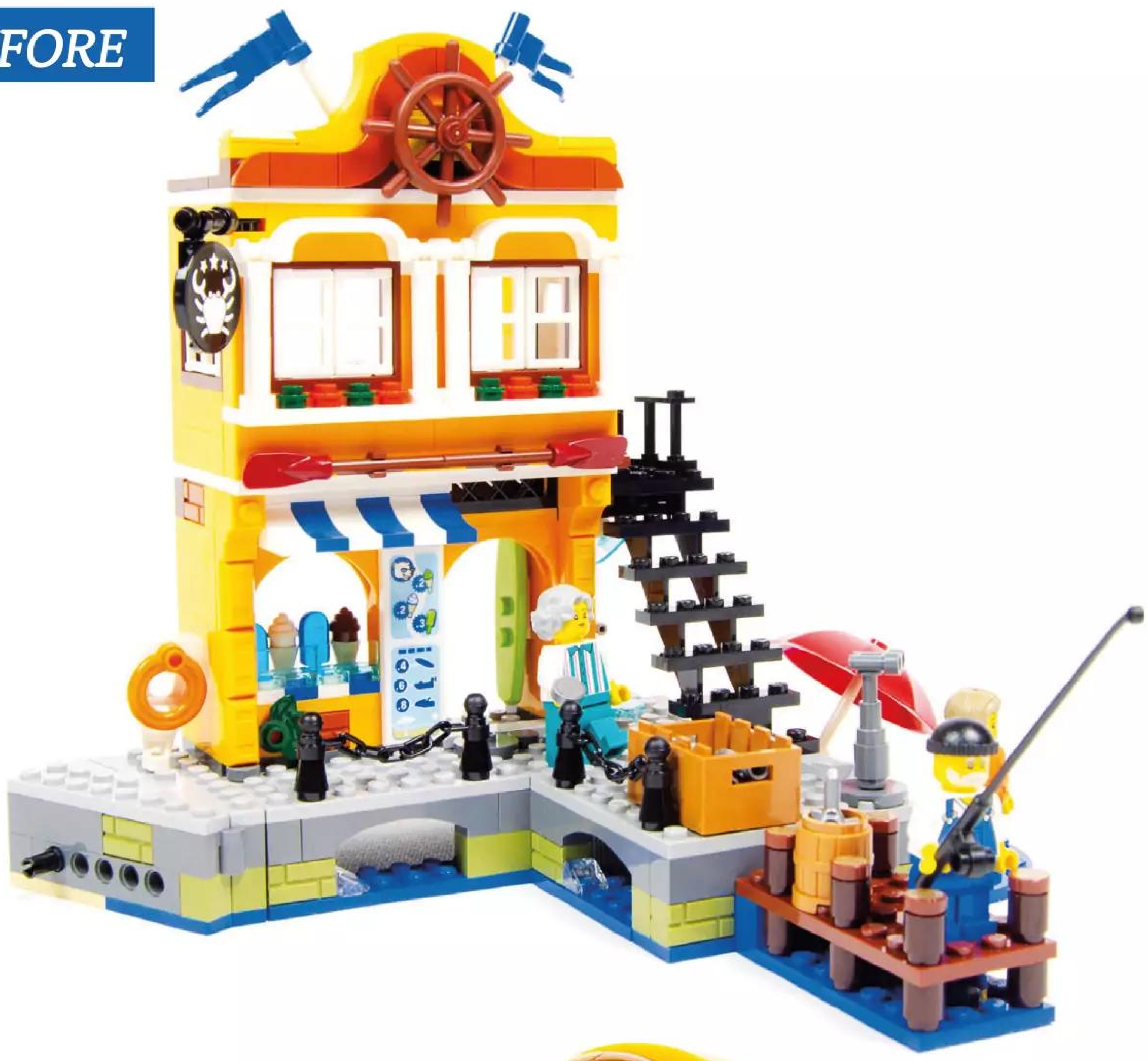
The Modular Building Collection provides inspiration for creating buildings with multiple floors. The roof and the top floor are easy to remove so that you can access the interior.

The bottom floor is devoted to the ice cream stand and surf shop with equipment for rent as in the official set, just with a much-expanded footprint and corresponding offerings for beachgoers. The upper floor is exclusively for the restaurant with seating both inside and outside on the balcony.

It is very satisfying to have a fully enclosed building with two distinct floors surrounded by an expanded pier. The look and feel of the set are still present, but the model feels full and vibrant.

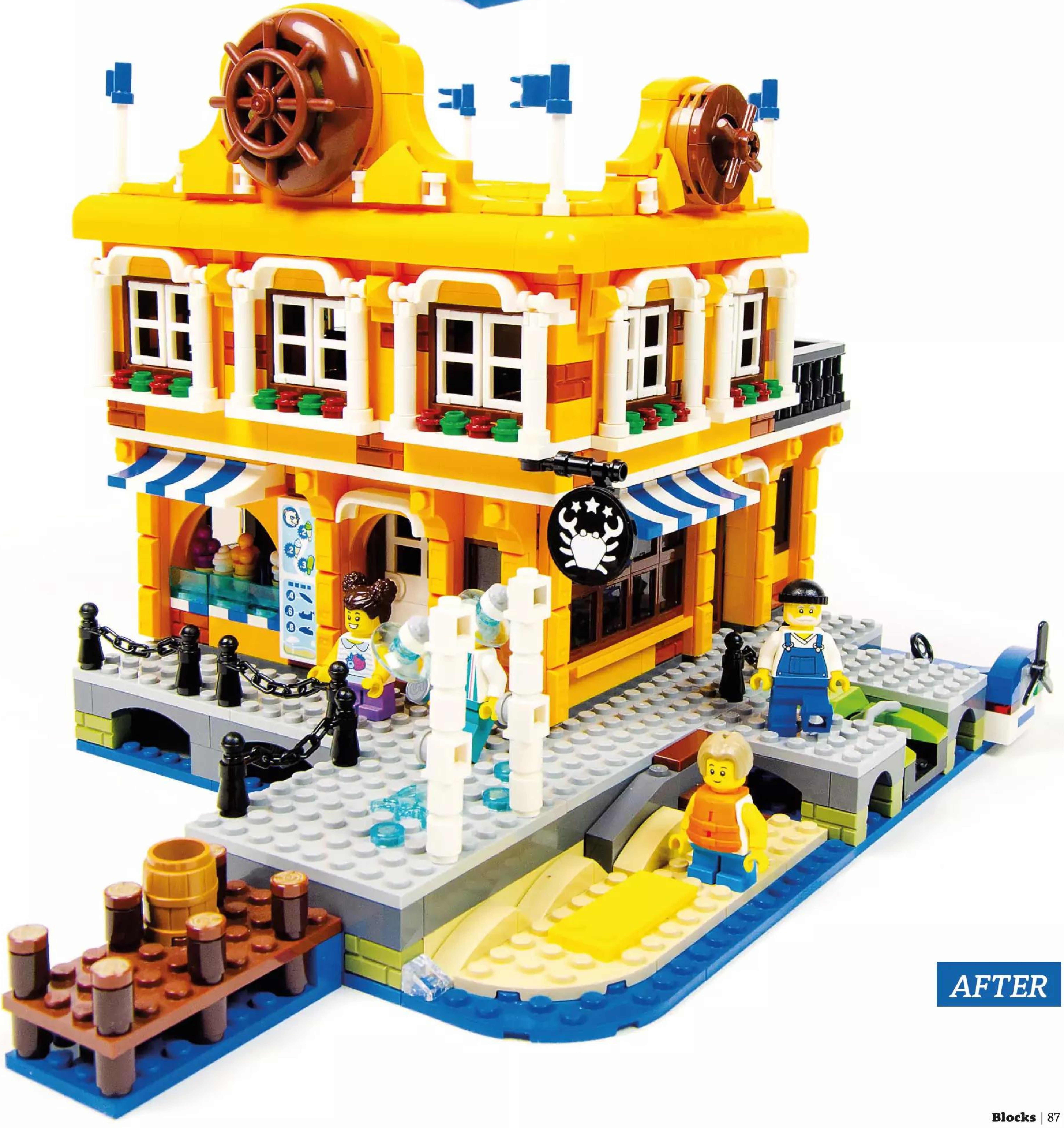


BEFORE



This project was created with support from LEGO Pick a Brick

Visit LEGO.com's Pick a Brick service to buy loose elements in whatever quantities you need. This project uses pieces provided by LEGO Pick a Brick, demonstrating what you can do when you take a LEGO set and add more bricks! Take inspiration from this specific build or let your imagination run wild – be sure to share what you create with Blocks.



AFTER

SHOWER

A key piece of Jedi wisdom says that sand is course, rough, irritating and gets everywhere. Showers are found by the beach on boardwalks and piers all over the world so that beachgoers can wash their sandy feet before leaving. Minifigures want to keep their blocky feet clean too, so having a pair of showers on the recreational side of the pier is essential for this scene.

These are based on the shower that is part of the official set, but rather than being tucked back under an awning, they are located right next to the sand for easy access. The key element is the angled mounting bracket that was originally created for posing minifigures. At a 45-degree angle, it makes the perfect showerhead. Water puddles at the base add a sense that they are frequently in use.

You could add a second faucet near the ground. These are often part of beach showers to allow for the filling of dog bowls or the easy washing of feet.

The bit of beach included in the set isn't exactly large, so another way to expand this model would be to add more sand and give the impression that this is an appealing bit of coast for City residents to visit.

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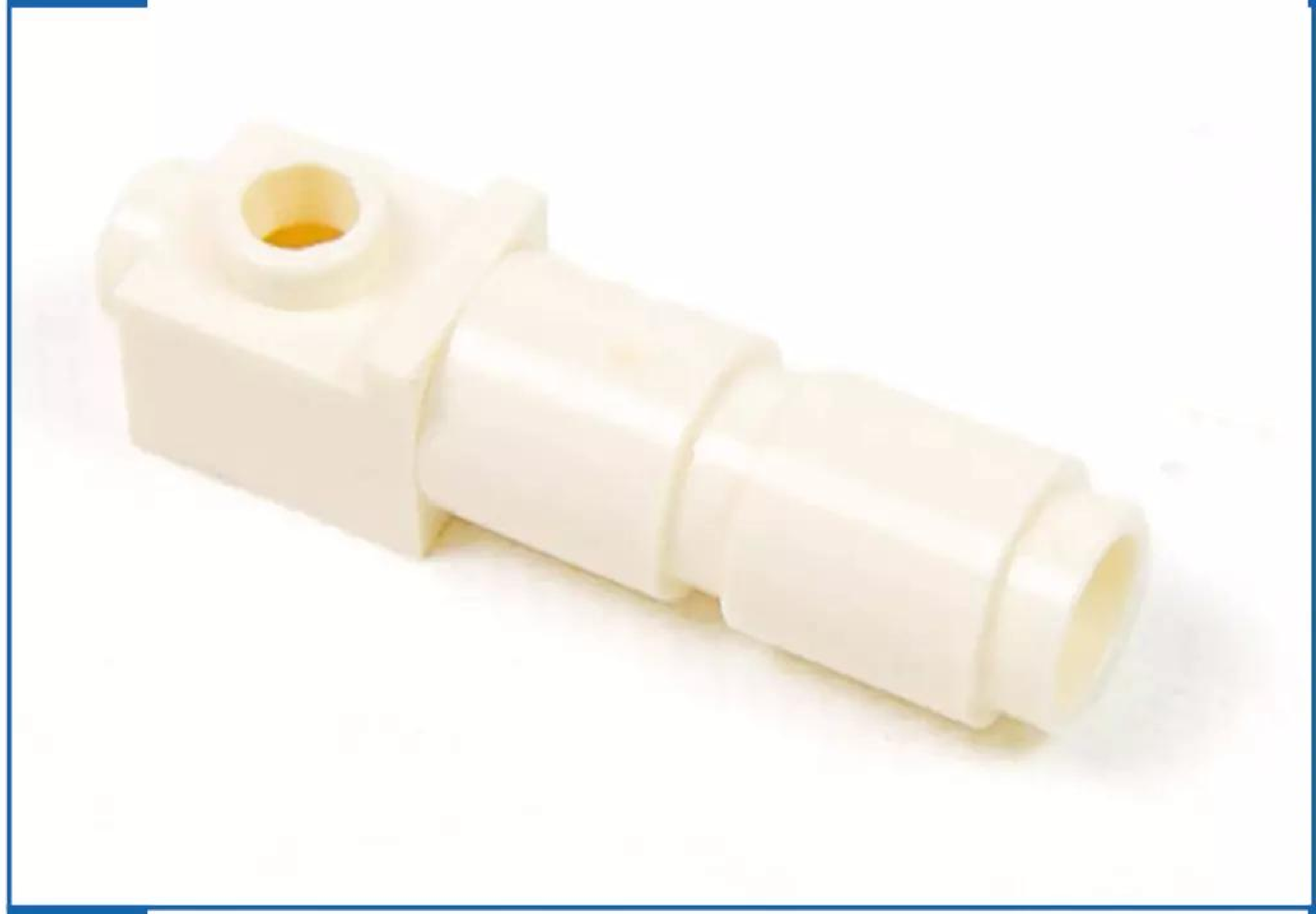

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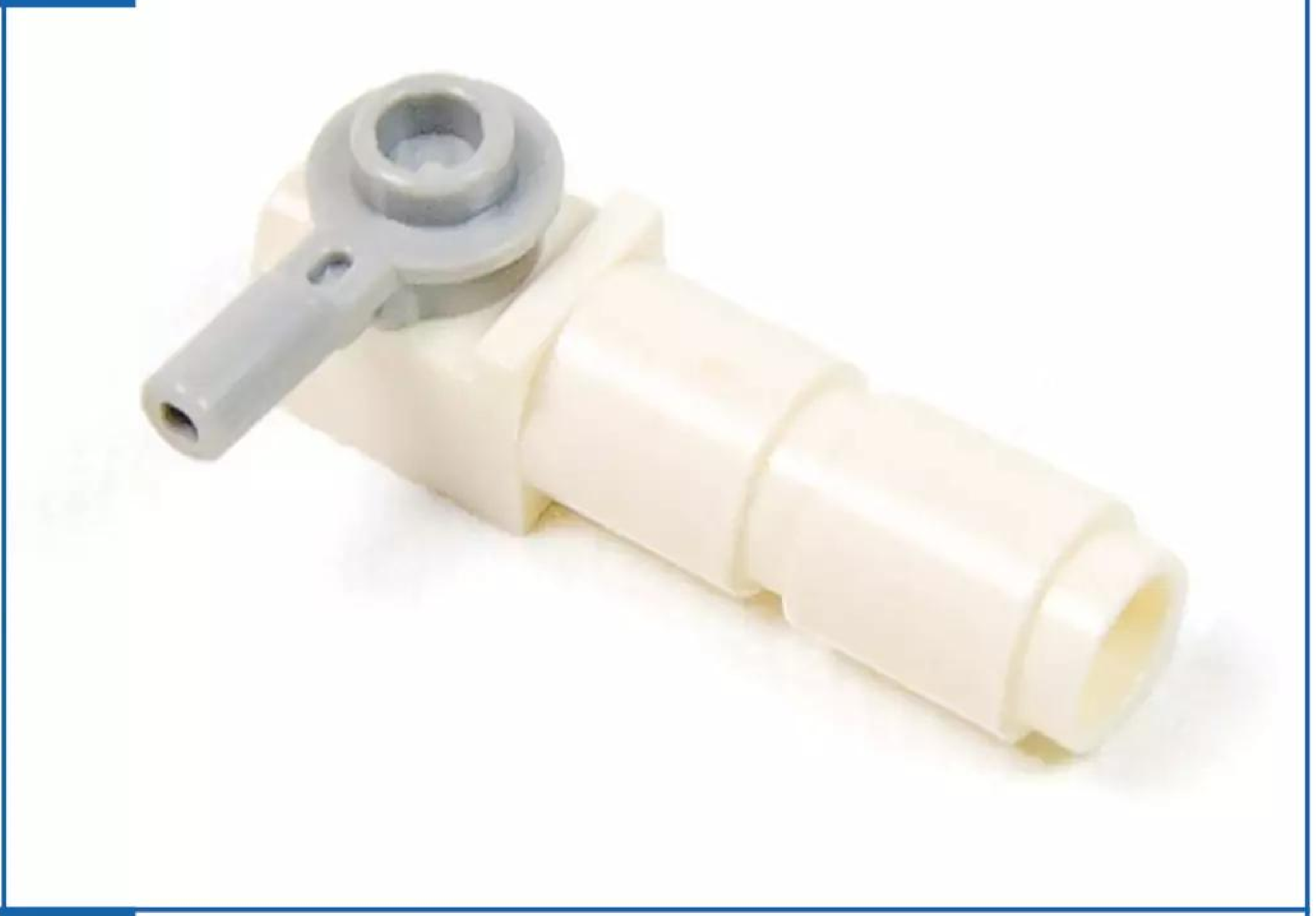

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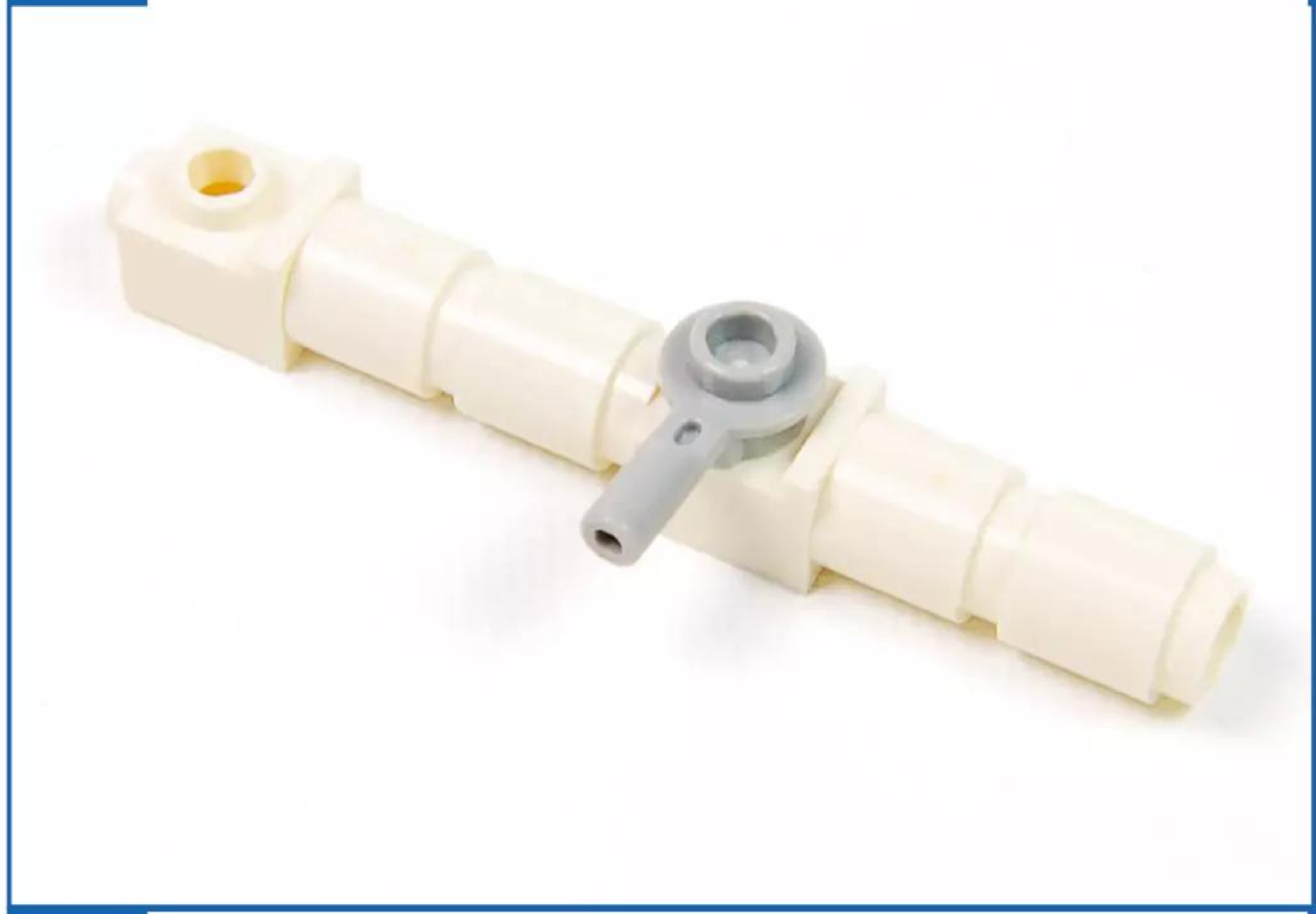

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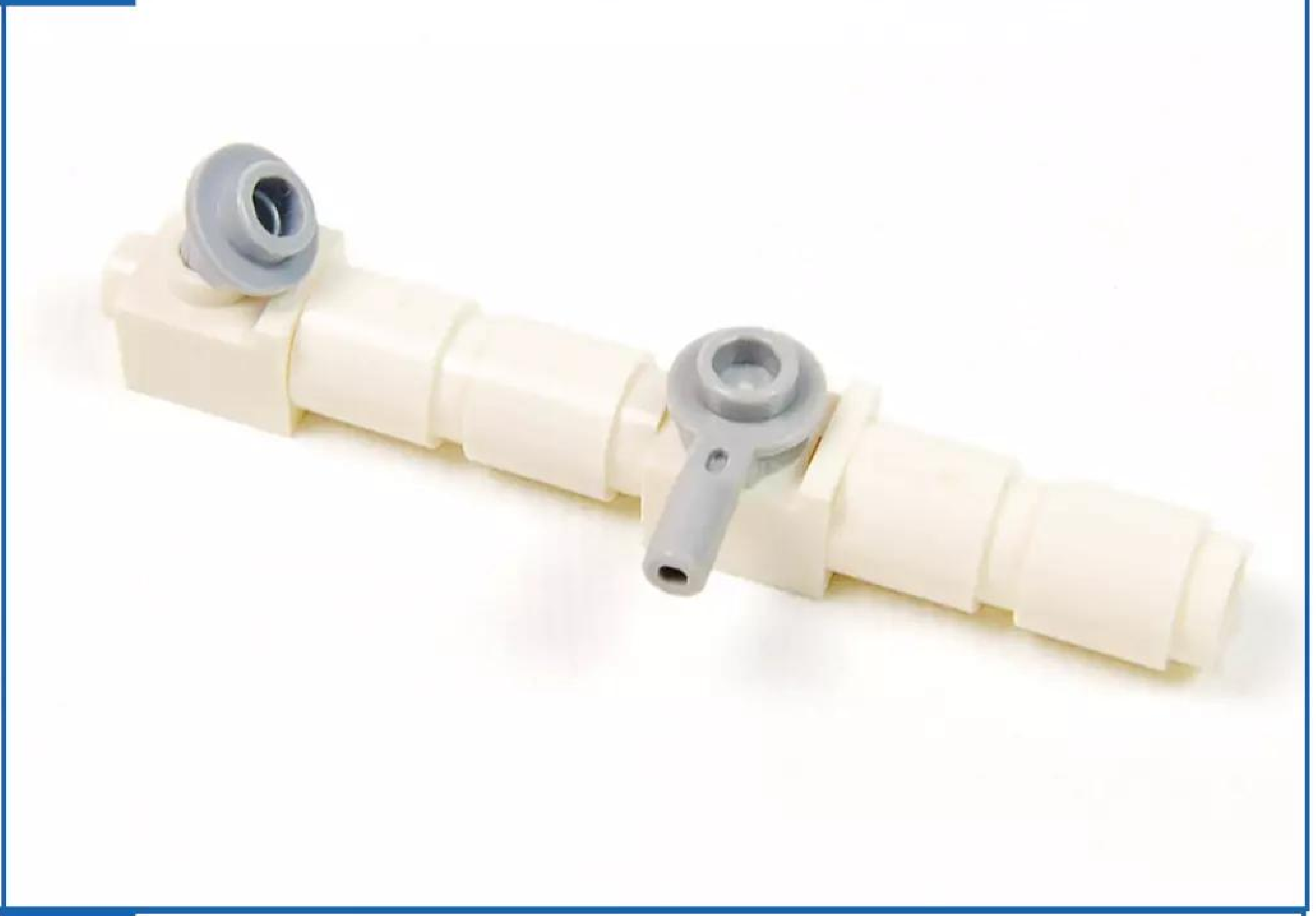

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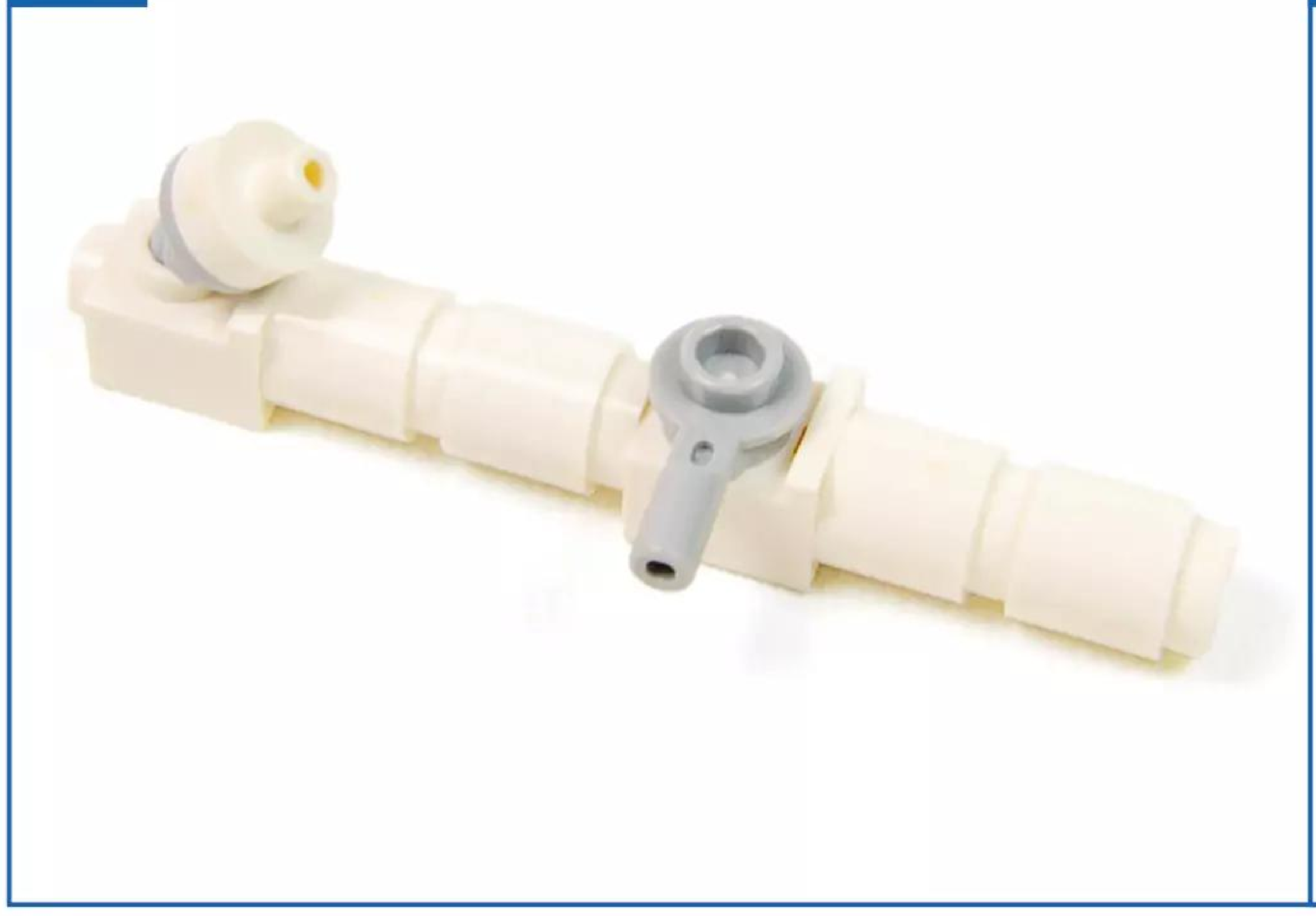

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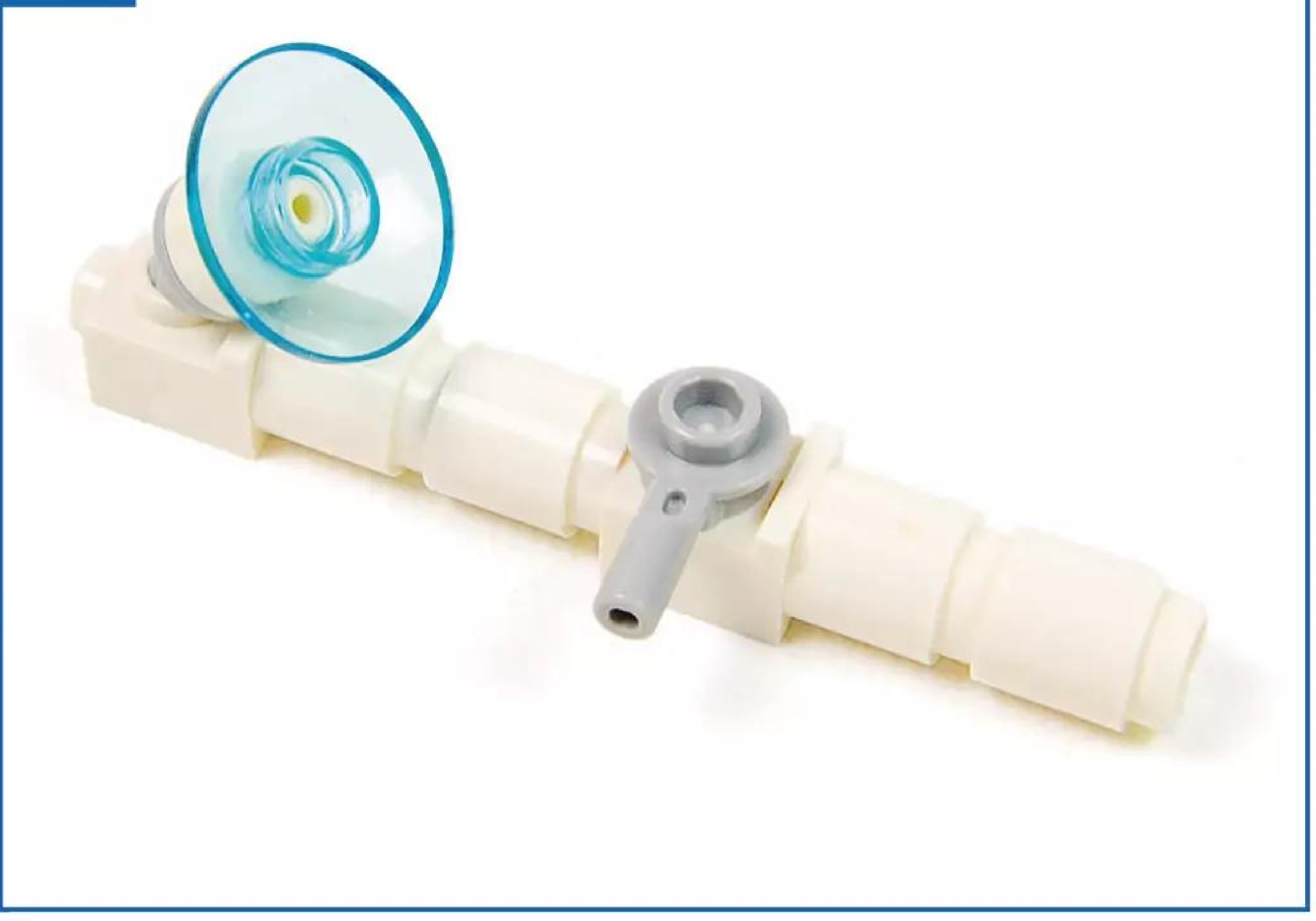

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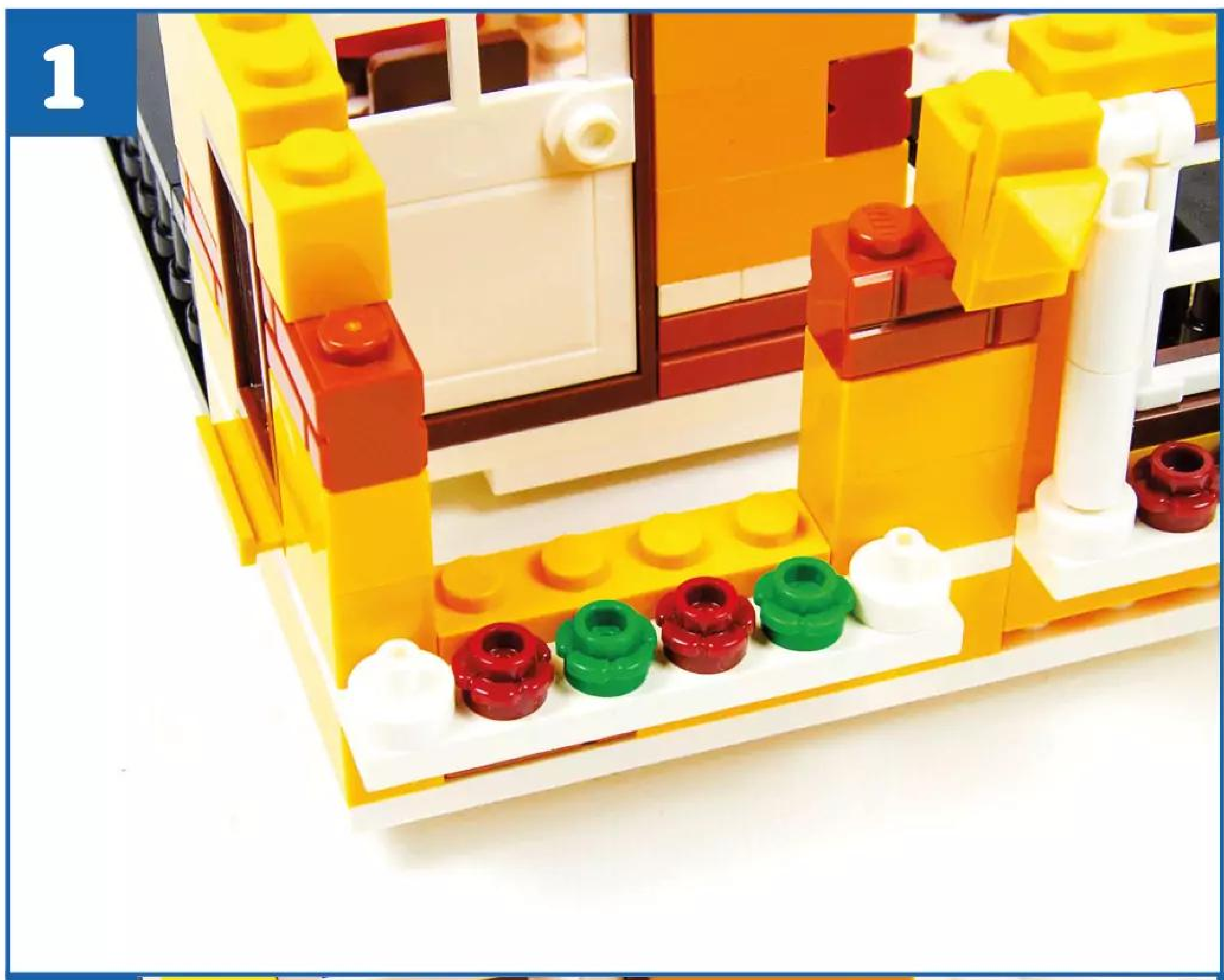

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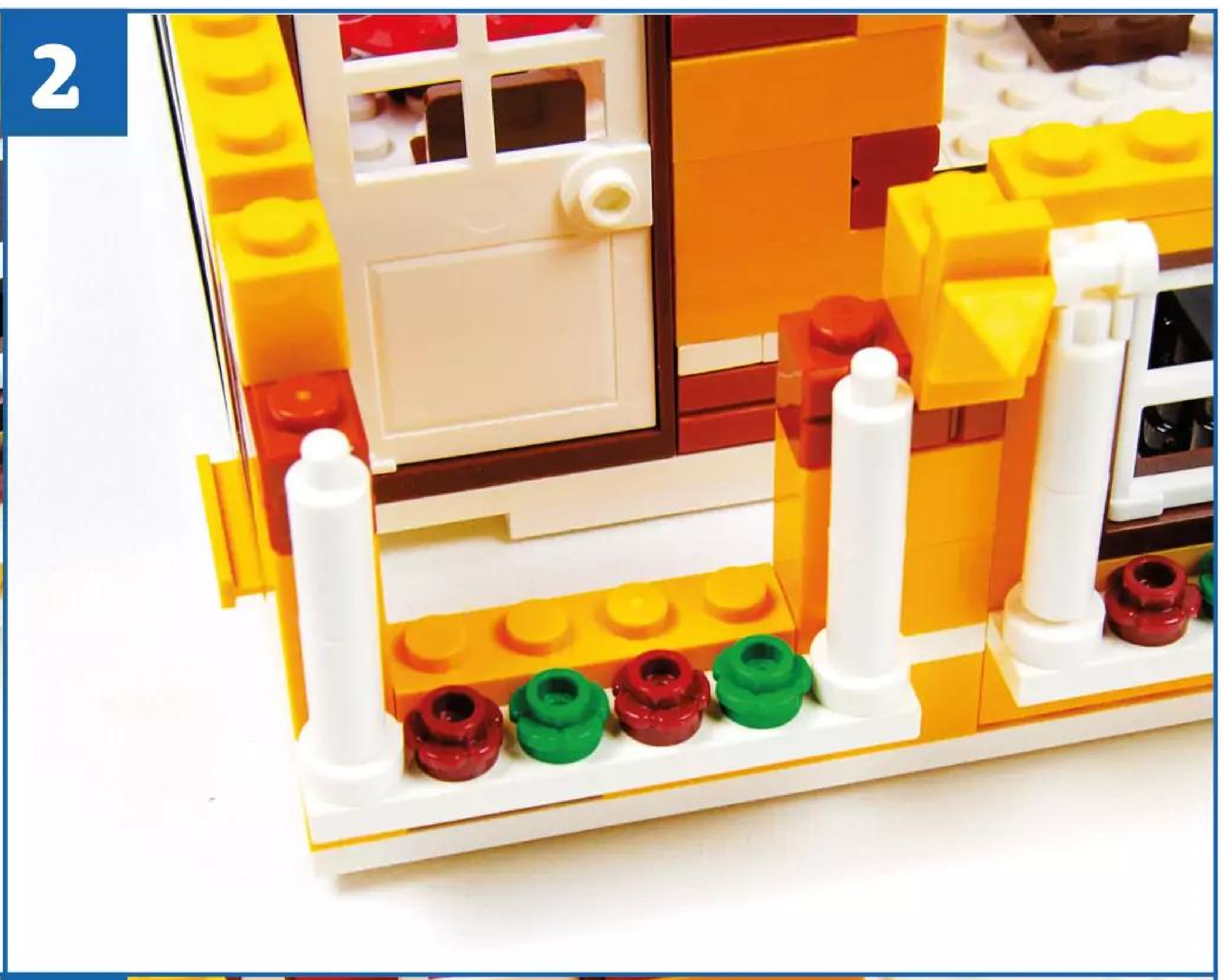

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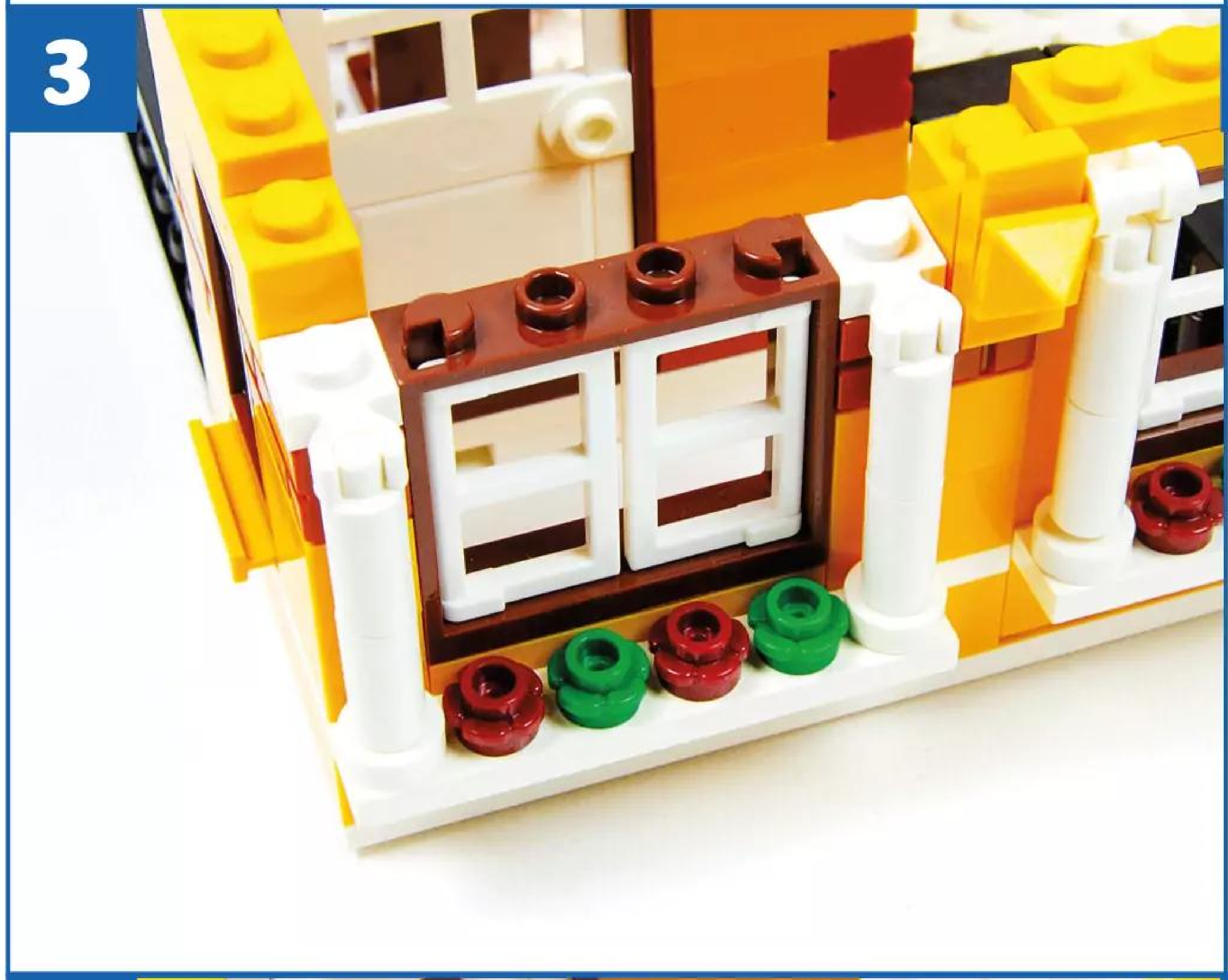

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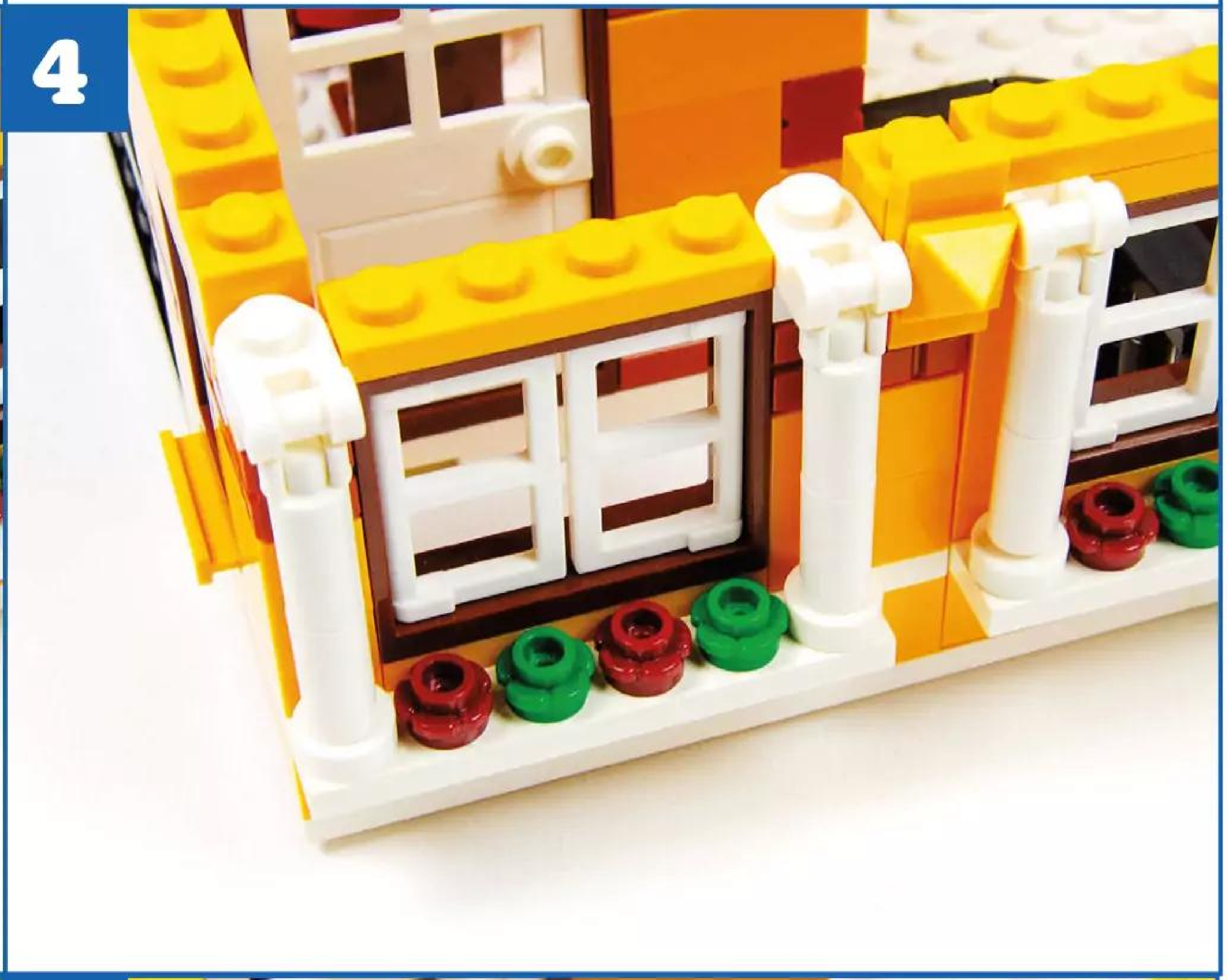

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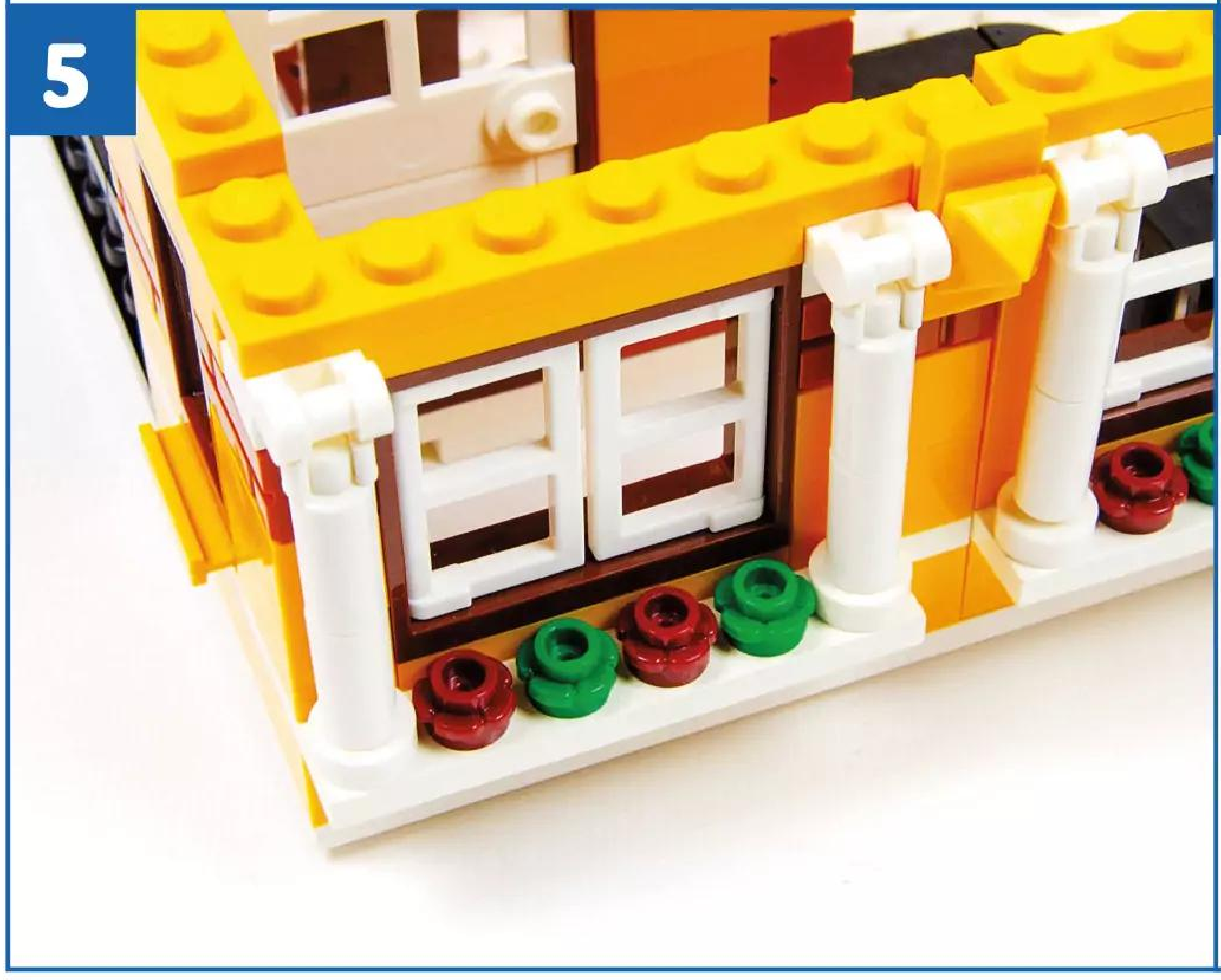

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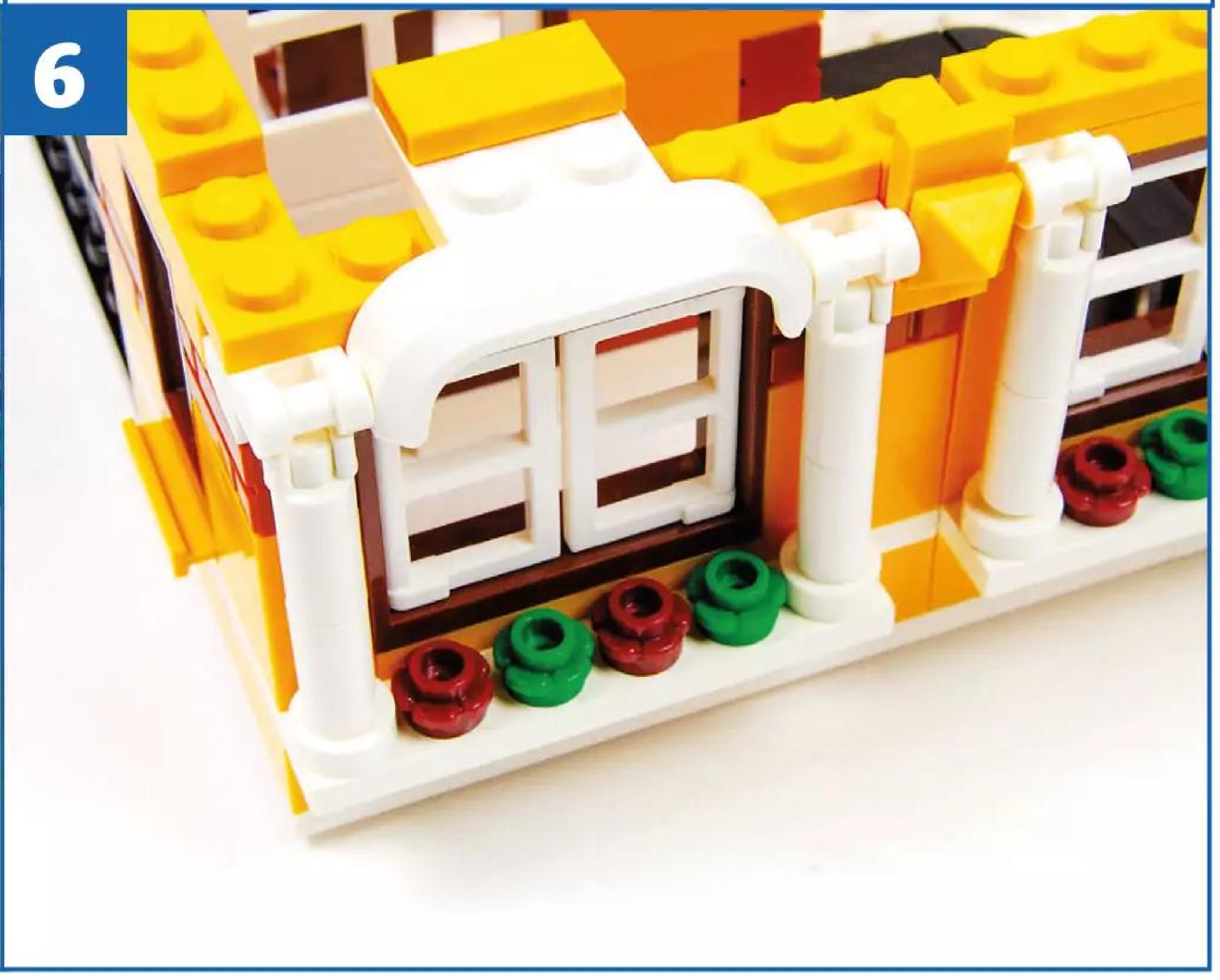

WINDOW

Through the years, largely thanks to modular buildings, windows on LEGO structures have progressively become more ornate. Decorative details on their outsides can be used to accentuate the standard window frames that have been around for decades, making the mundane look much more interesting. Inspired by the windows in the official set, this upgrade adds such detailing to the second storey.

The inkwell and candle elements are key pieces for this construct. Combining them forms mini columns that frame each window and are capped by a modified plate with bar element sticking out its front. Modular buildings also pioneered the use of vehicle wheel wells as lintels over the tops of windows, a technique that works well here. As the connector is two studs deep, it also provides a platform on which to place the roof.

The entire construct looks very decorative and takes up a six-stud wide footprint. Be sure to lay builds like this out ahead of time to make sure there are no unsightly gaps.

If you want to add another storey to the building, you could repeat this window style, or adapt it so that the windows look similar but have different embellishments.

CURVED SIGN

One of the greatest additions to the LEGO elements catalogue in recent years is the family of inverted, sloped curves. Regular sloped curves have existed since the early 1990s, but their inverse are relatively new inventions, especially by comparison. When paired together, they allow for continuous, sweeping curved edges that can greatly enhance the visual appeal of a build.

The original restaurant in 60422 Seaside Harbour with Cargo Ship has such a configuration at the top of its front façade, so the concept expands as the build gets larger, with a trio of these features on various sides of the building. Each is a different size, but all use the same basic formula.

Begin with the inverted curves at the base. There are multiple sizes now including 1x2, 1x3 and 1x4 studs. Follow these with standard curves of various angles and sizes to top everything off and mirror this down the other side.

The beauty of construction like this, aside from the graceful curves, is that it create an open, flat space on the front to include details such as signage. These building tops look much more appealing than a regular flat roof.

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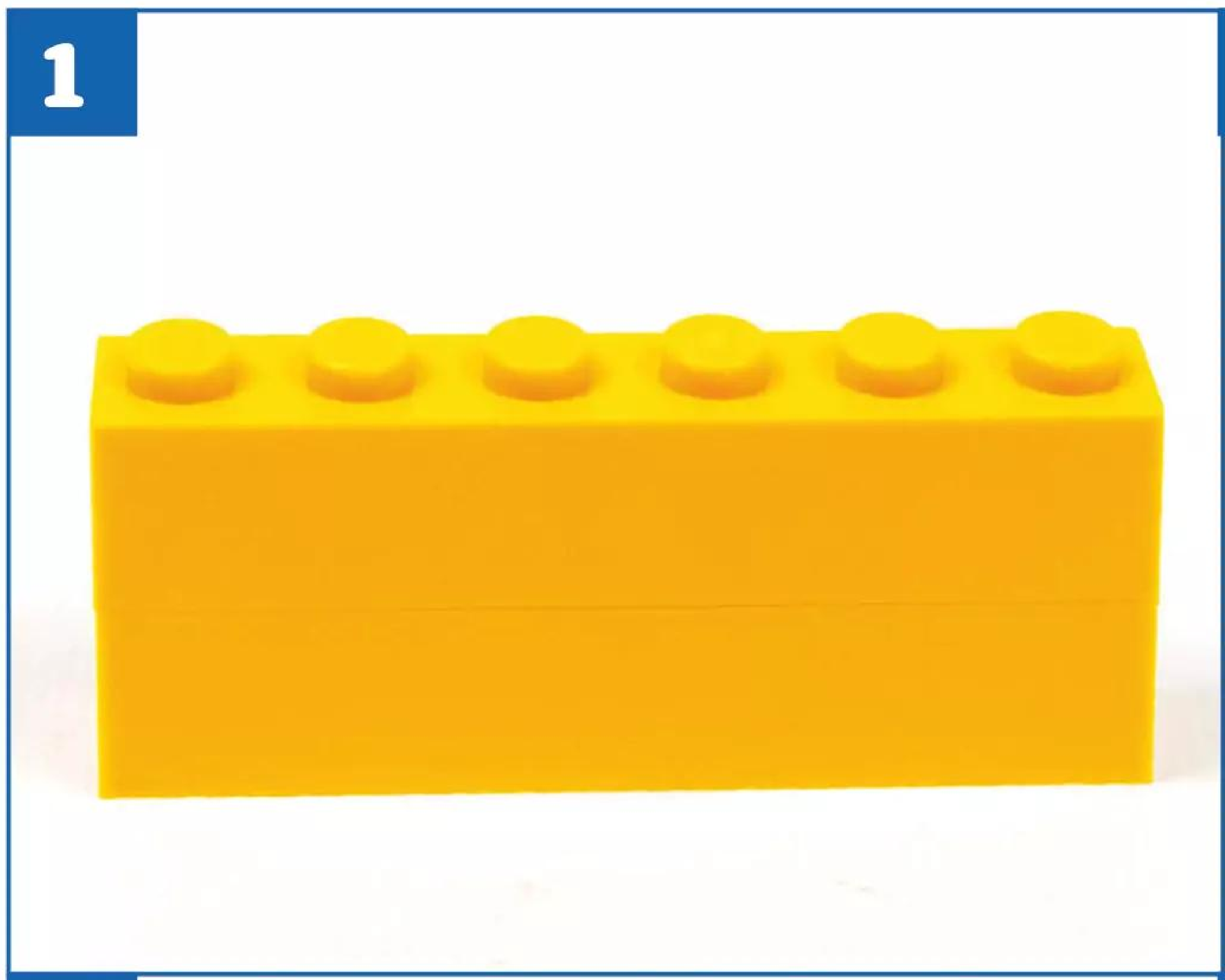

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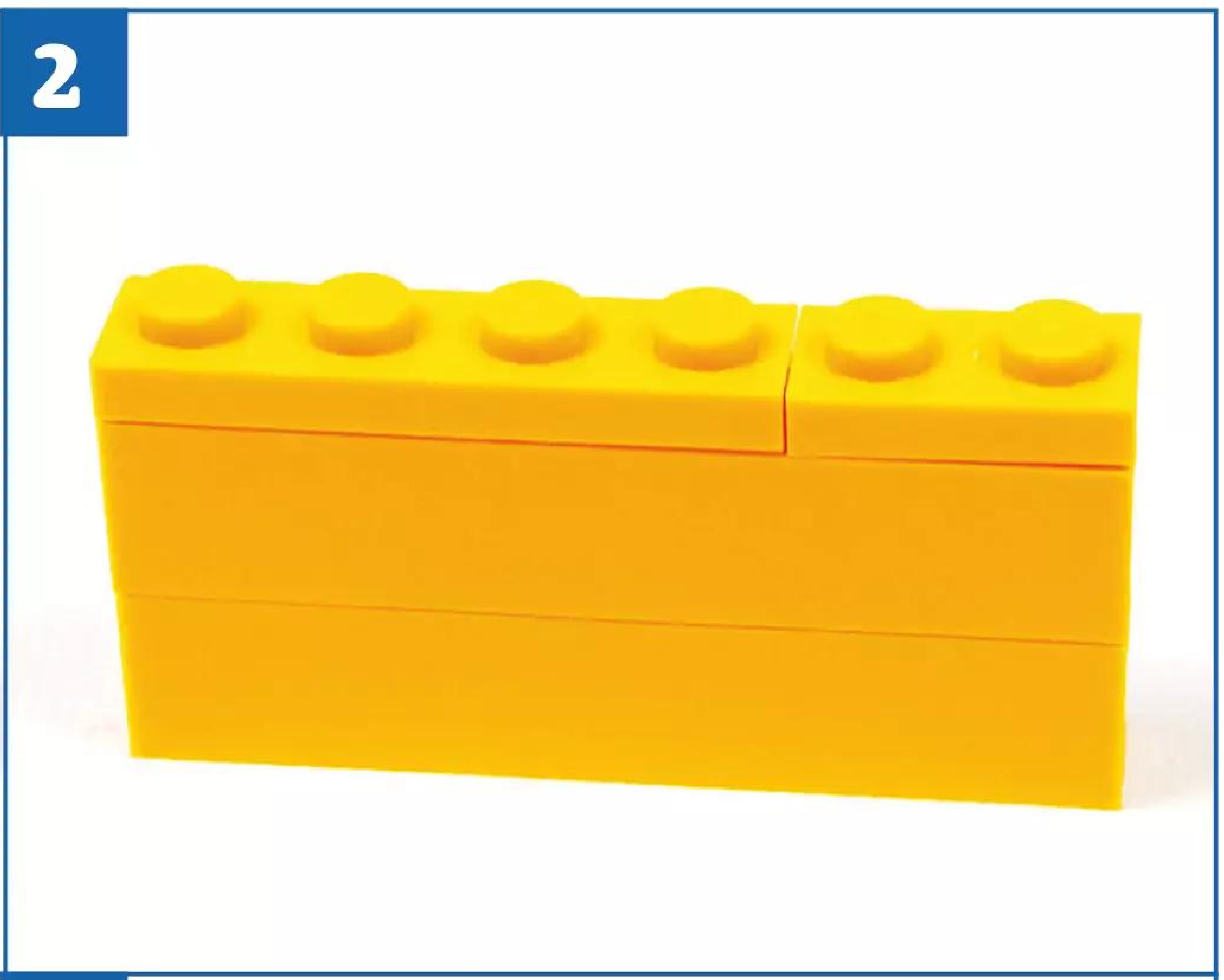

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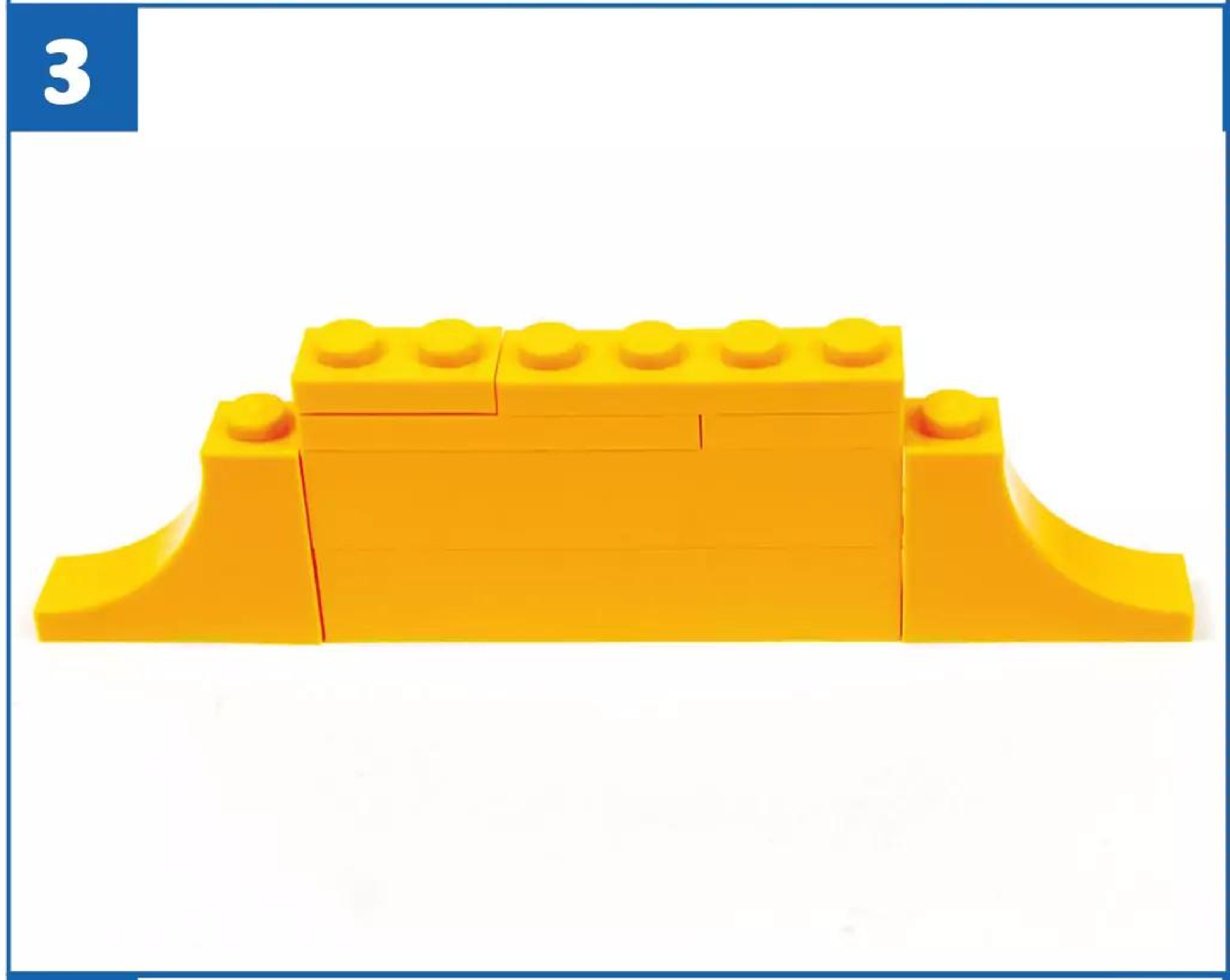

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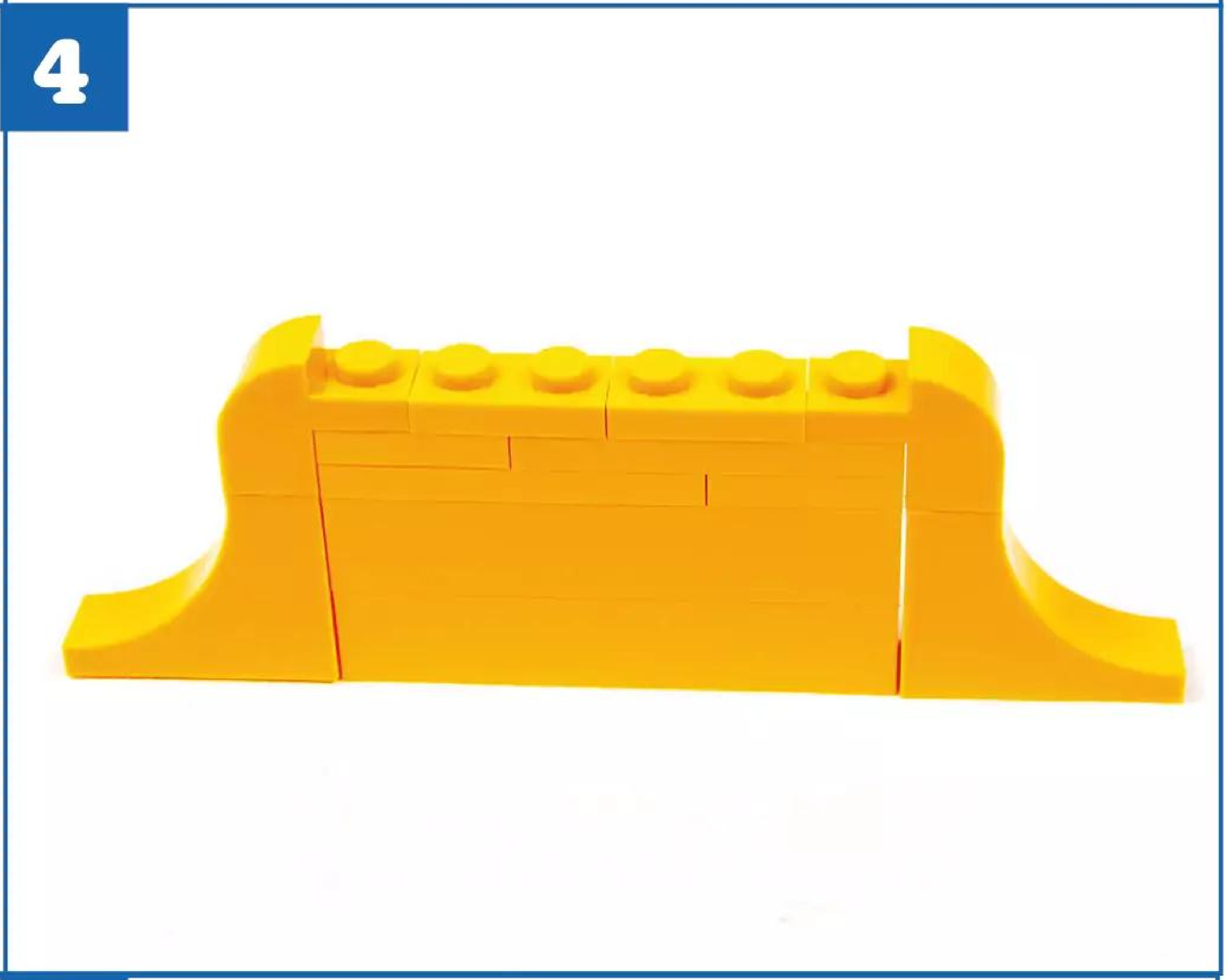

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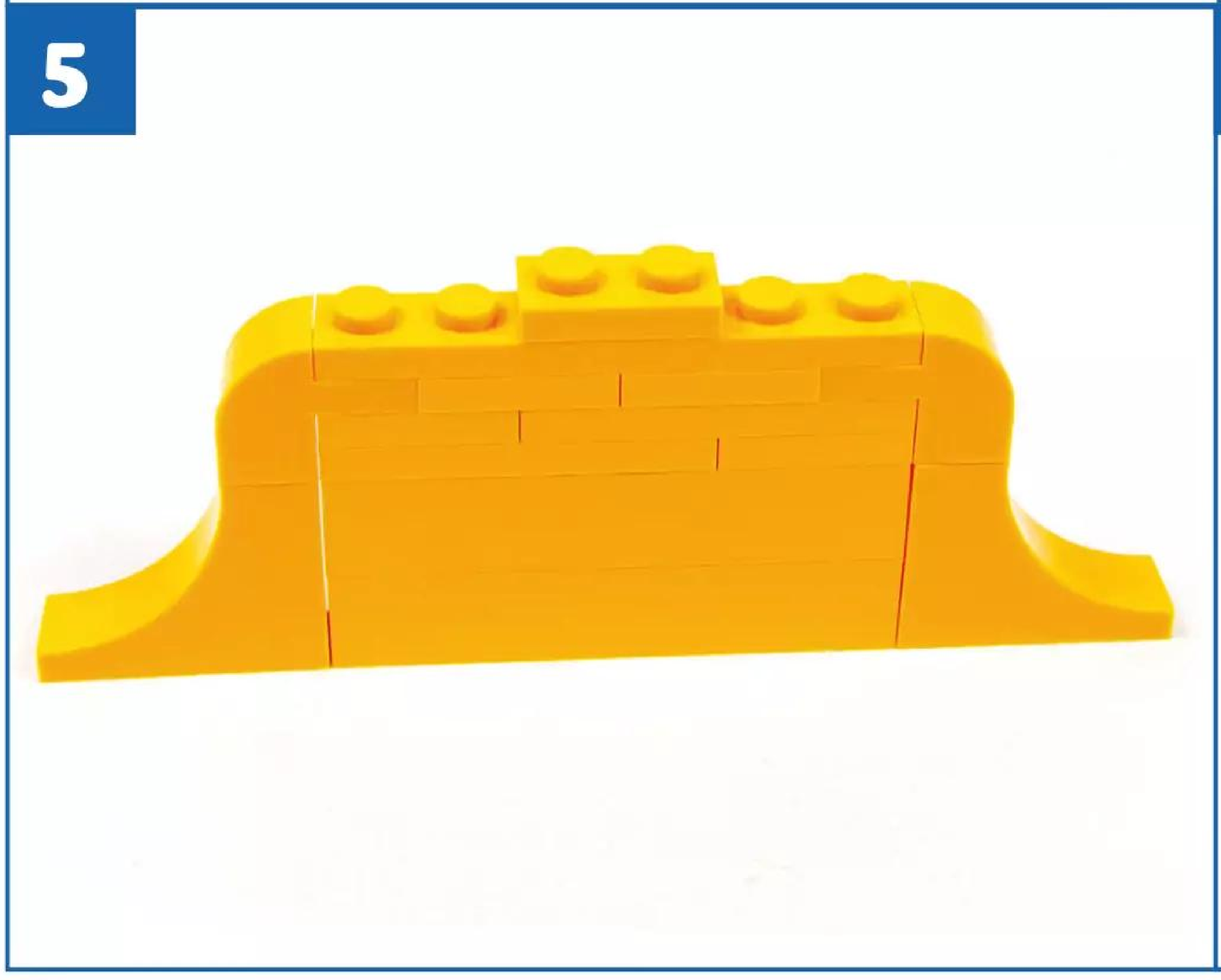

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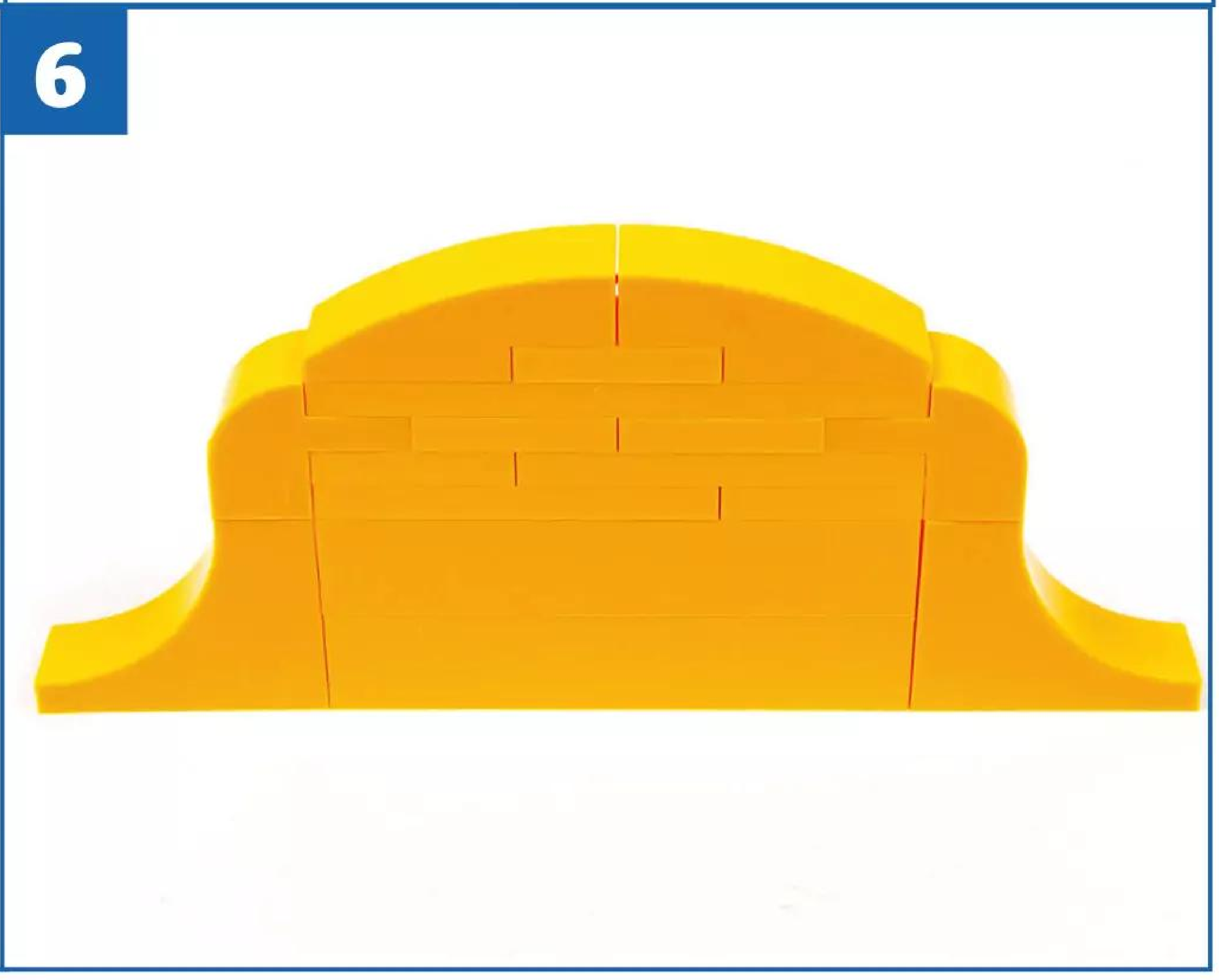

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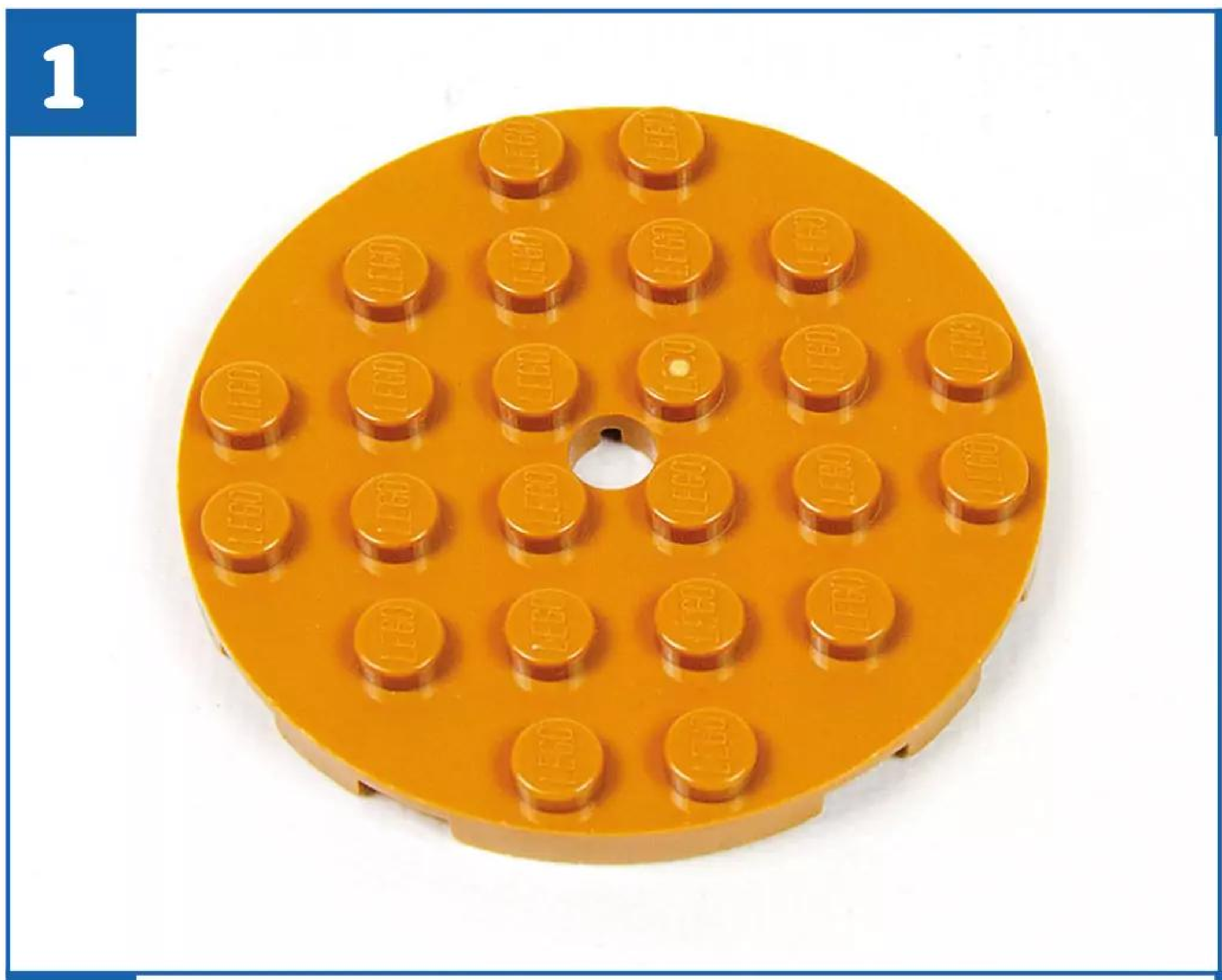

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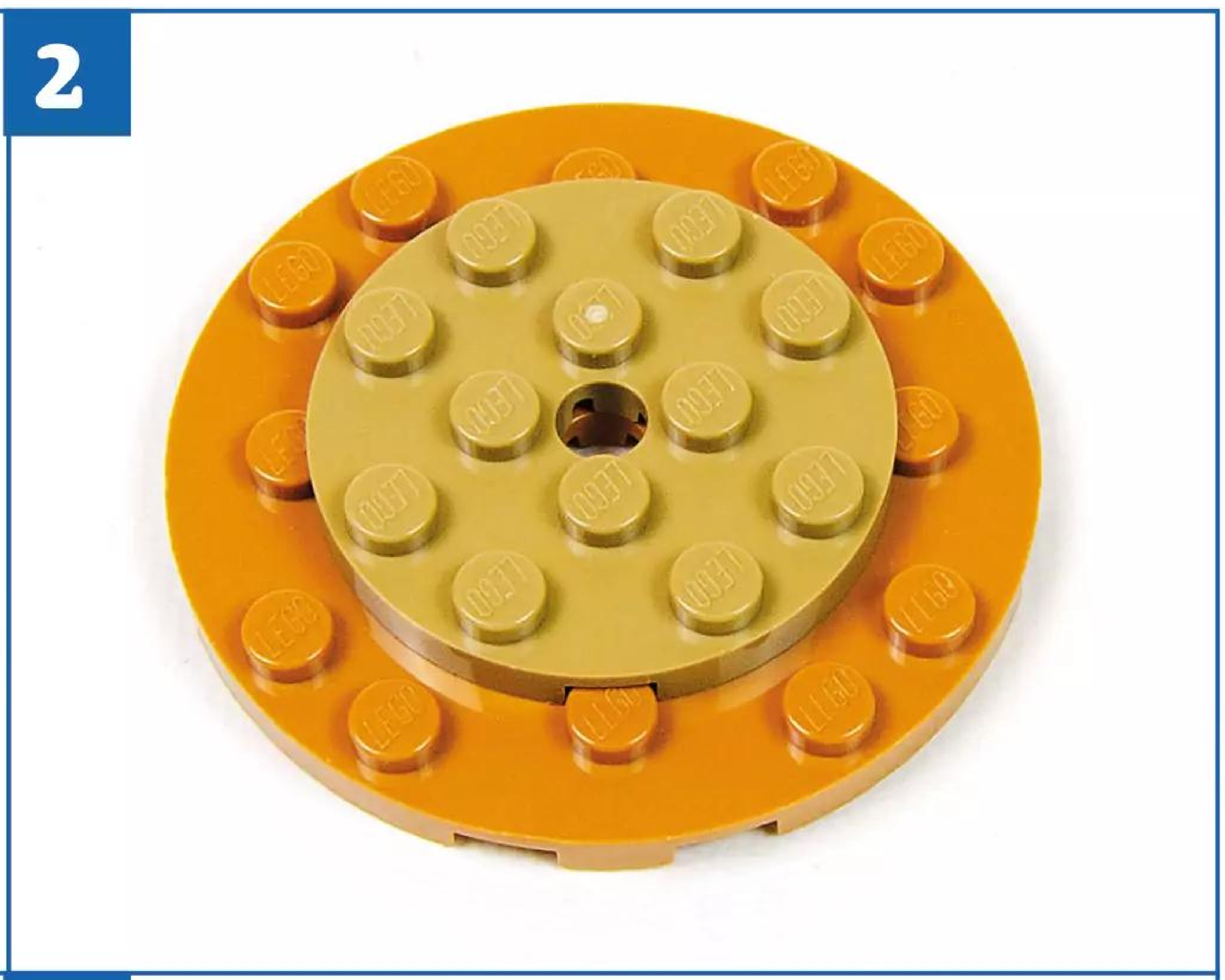

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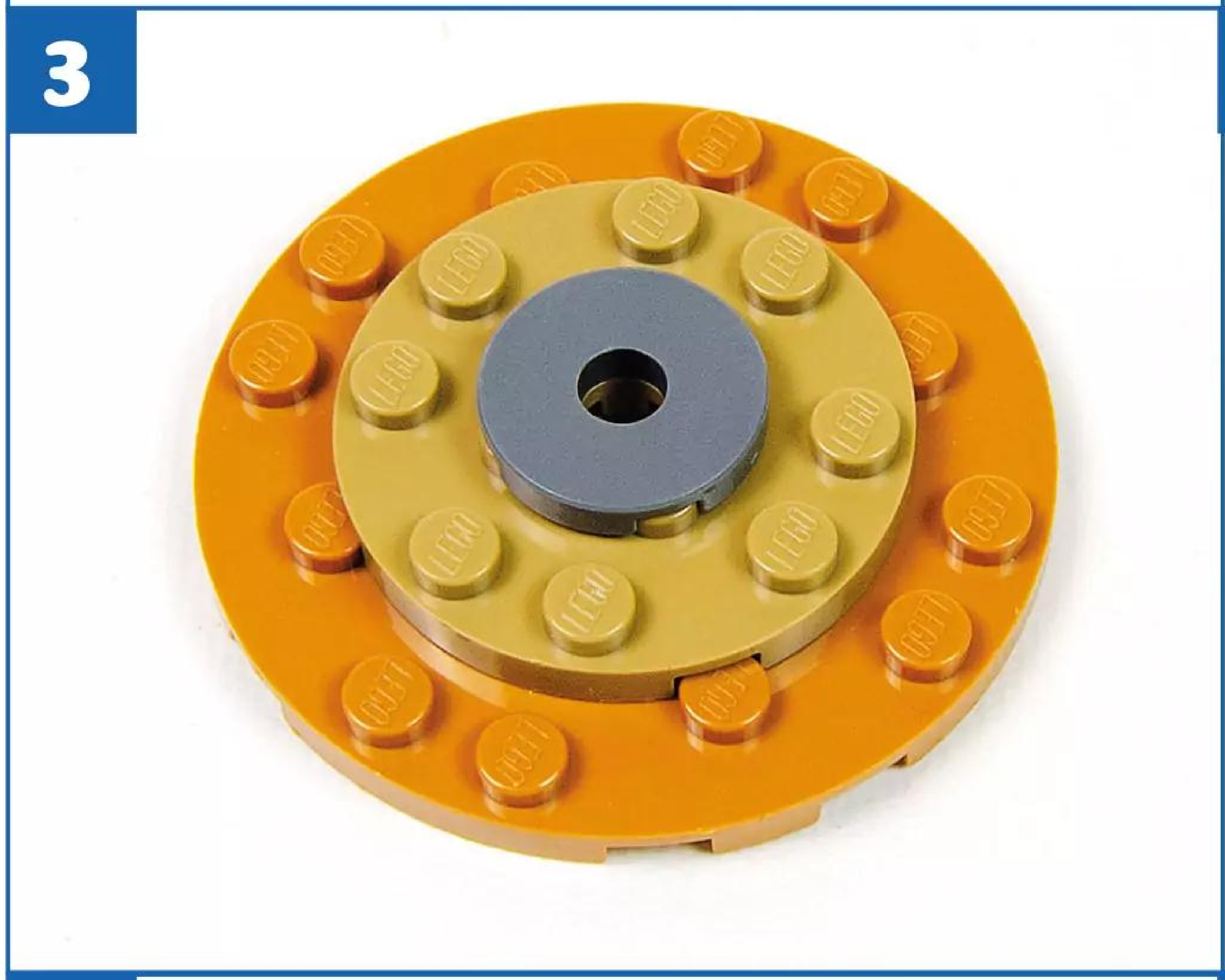

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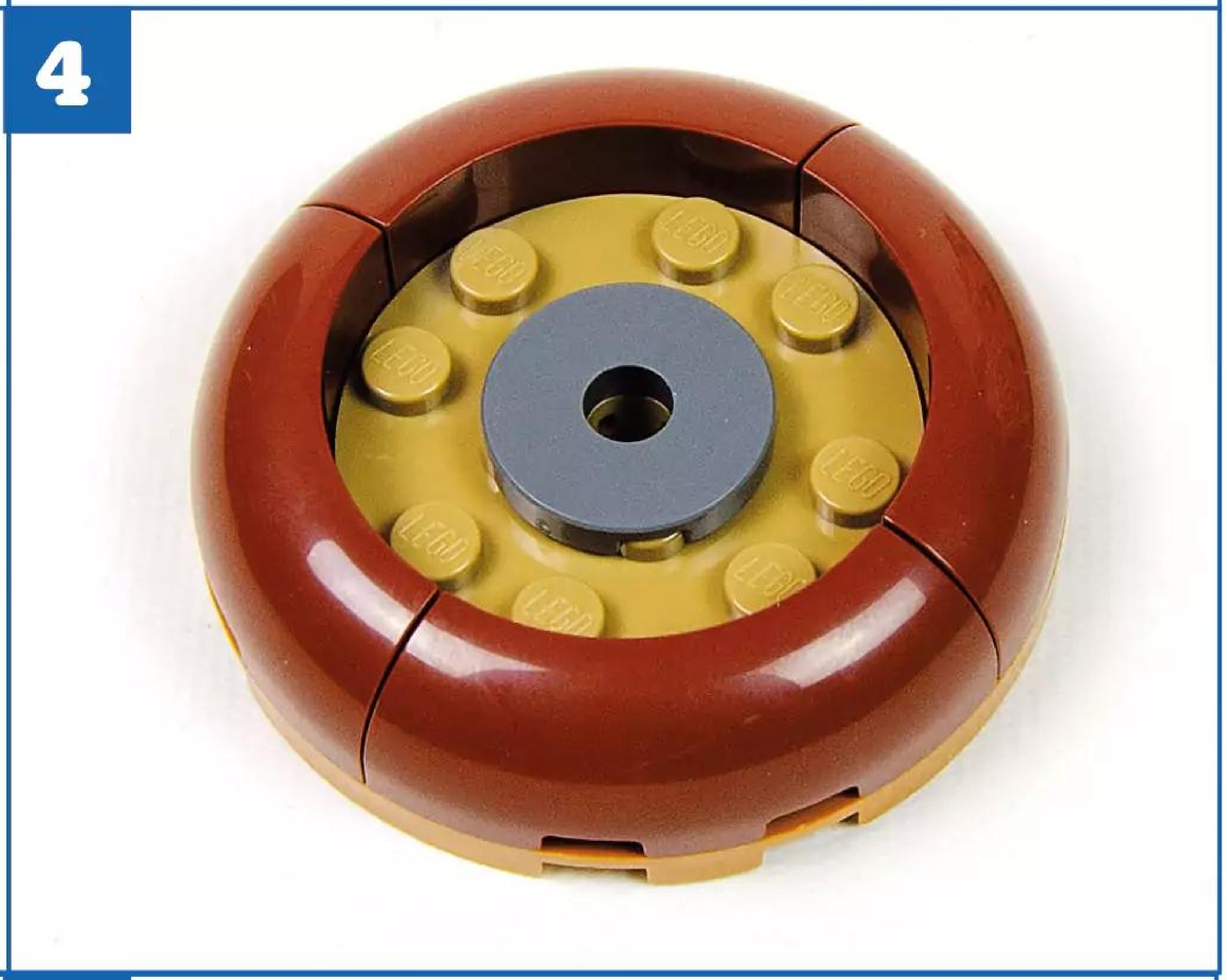

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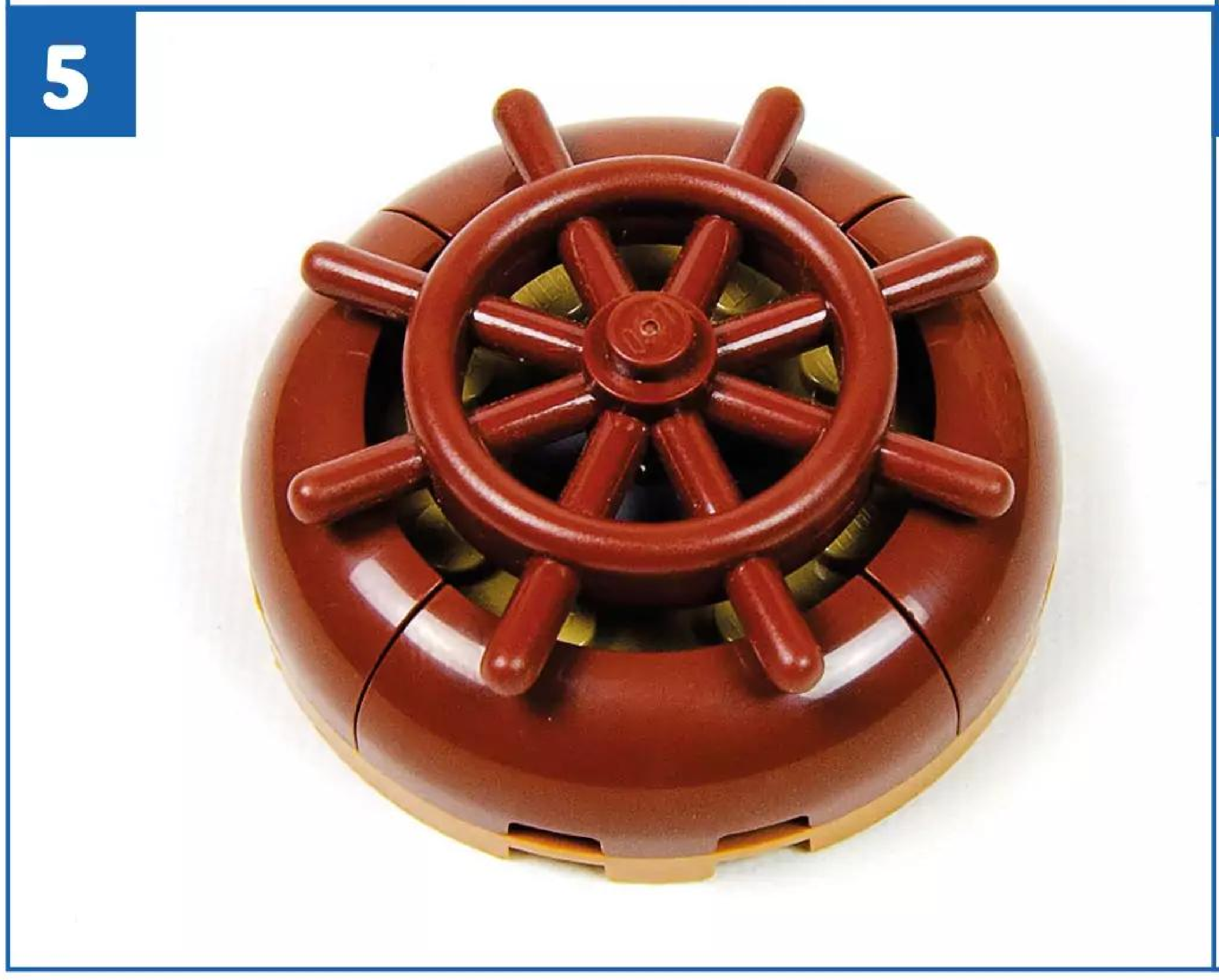

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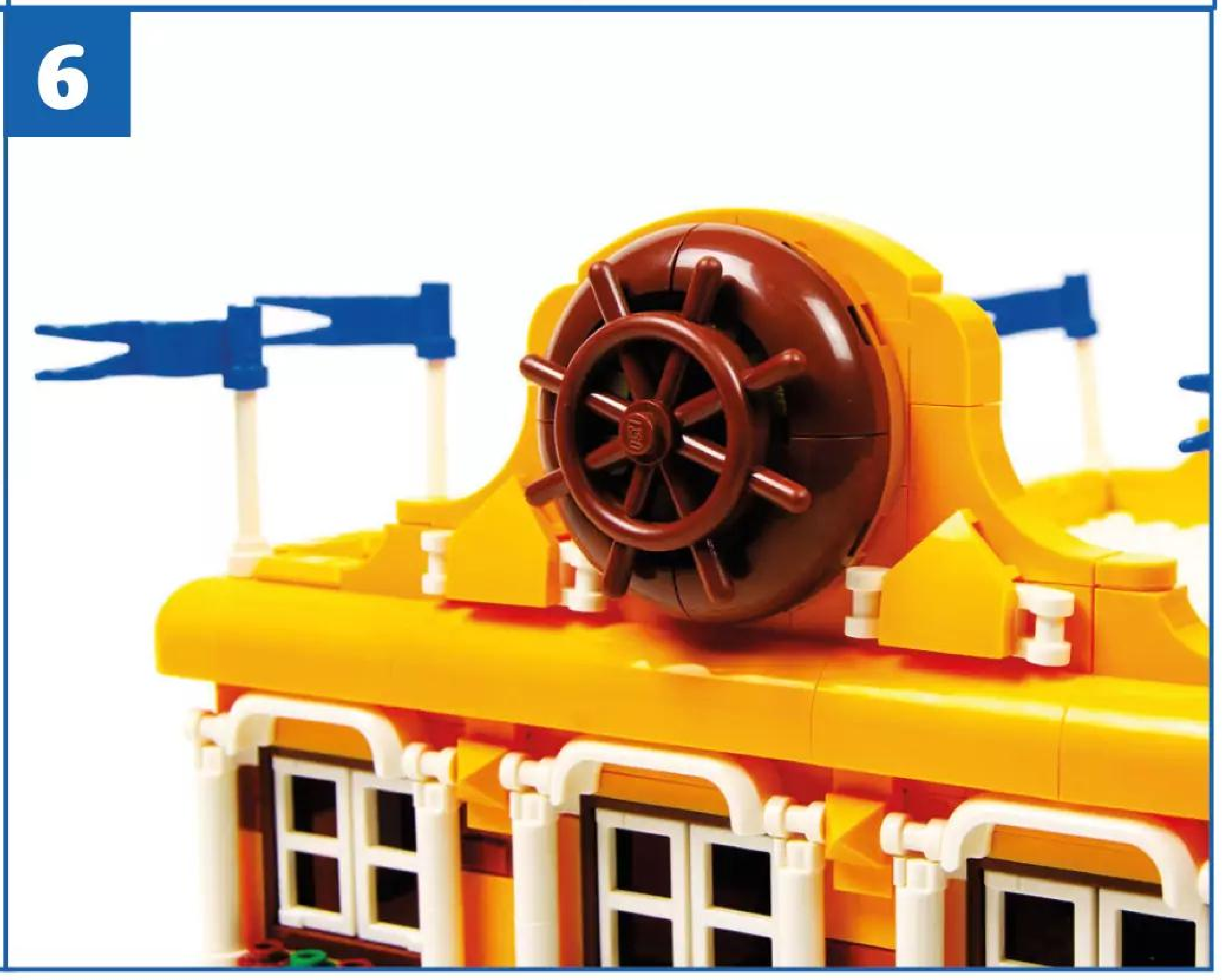


WHEEL SIGN

Seaside restaurants almost always feature boat or ship motifs in their décor. These can include pictures of tall, masted ships on the walls, mounted fish and various boat parts, especially ship wheels.

The set includes a wheel flush with the top wall of the building on the exterior. With the building getting larger, this key decoration needs to be more ornate.

Several different circular plates of decreasing diameter, topped with a round tile, form the base of this construct. The hole all the way through is vital in order to mount the ship's wheel in the centre.

Around this there is a relatively new type of element. These curved slopes are great for creating circles so deliver a very appealing, round border to the ship wheel. They also create depth and make the sign less flat. To mount this to the wall, use modified bricks with studs on the side.

Inside the restaurant, you could use bricks with side studs to add decorations to the walls. Those decorations could be paintings, crabs, nautical equipment… anything that you would typically see in a seafood restaurant.

The Lord of the Rings

Build: *The Destruction of Laketown*
Builder: *Geneva Durand*
Instagram: *genevadurand*
Year: *2023*

Build: *Bag End*
Builder: *Dylan Lane*
Instagram: *dylanlaneart*
Year: *2022*

Build: *Emin Muil*
Builder: *Gus Farine*
Instagram: *faebricks*
Year: *2022*

Build: *Shelob*
Builder: *Grant Davis*
Instagram: *grantdvs1*
Year: *2023*

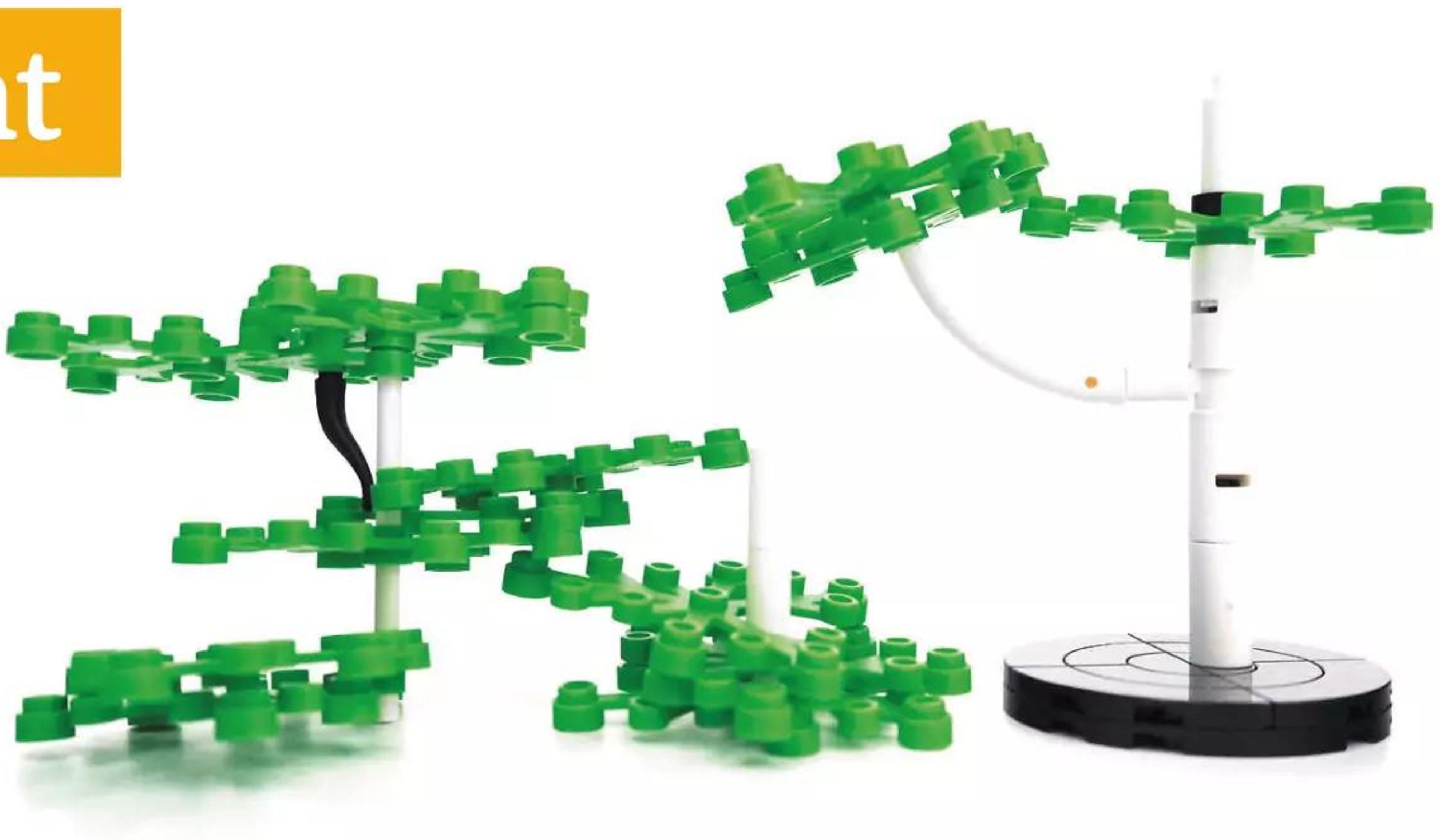
Build: *The Golden Hall of Meduseld*
Builder: *Olav*
Instagram: *norlego*
Year: *2018*

Build: *Lúthien Confronting Morgoth*
Builder: *Josiah Durand*
Instagram: *guillermodenavarre*
Year: *2023*

Build: *Gandalf Rides to Minas Tirith*
Builder: *Joe Minieri*
Instagram: *jnj_bricks*
Year: *2023*

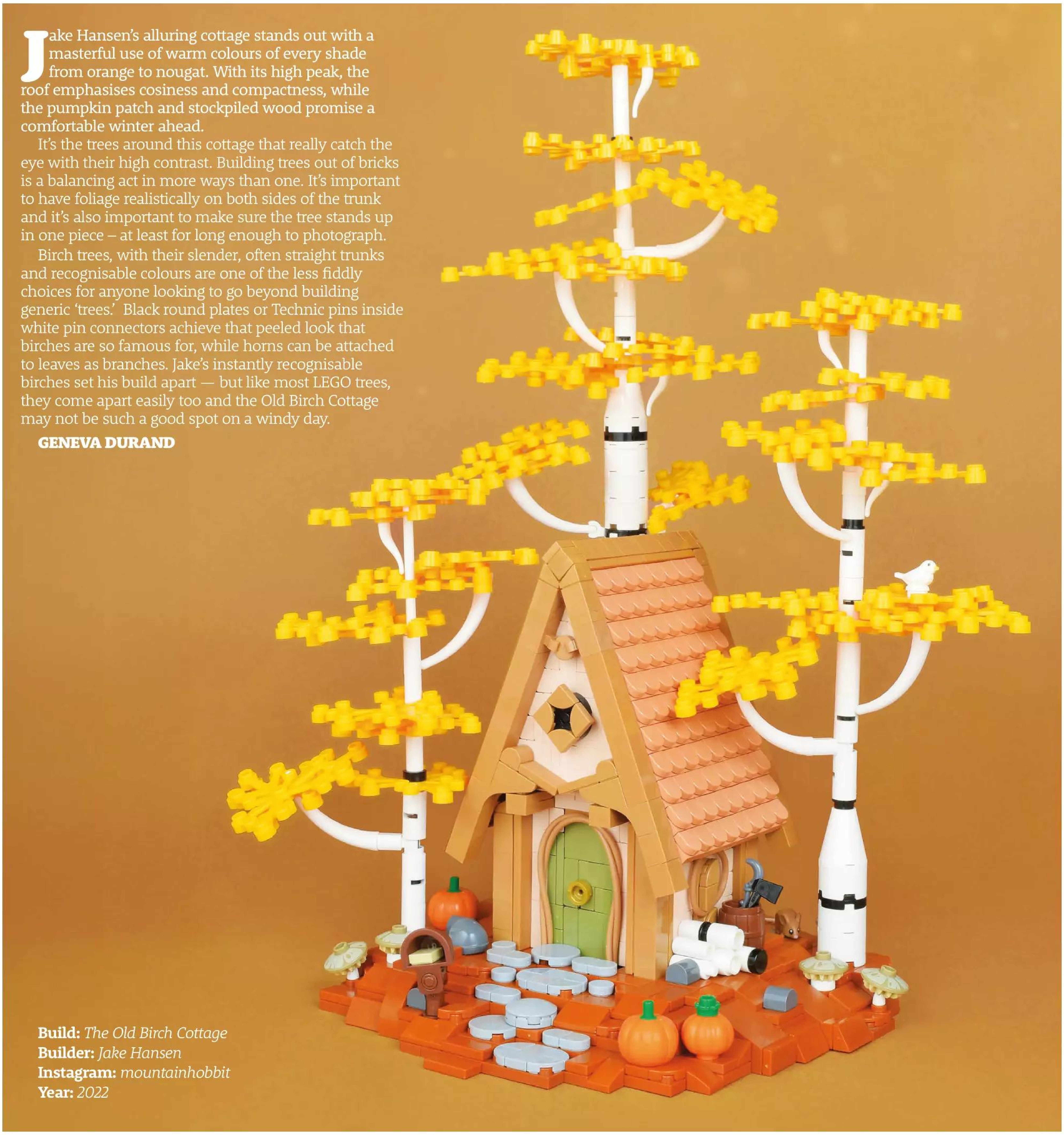
Build: *Théoden and Snowmane*
Builder: *Eero Okkonen*
Instagram: *eerookkonen*
Year: *2024*

Technique Spotlight



THE OLD BIRCH COTTAGE

Come and relax in this cosy cottage nestled in a warm forest of birch trees



Jake Hansen's alluring cottage stands out with a masterful use of warm colours of every shade from orange to nougat. With its high peak, the roof emphasises cosiness and compactness, while the pumpkin patch and stockpiled wood promise a comfortable winter ahead.

It's the trees around this cottage that really catch the eye with their high contrast. Building trees out of bricks is a balancing act in more ways than one. It's important to have foliage realistically on both sides of the trunk and it's also important to make sure the tree stands up in one piece – at least for long enough to photograph.

Birch trees, with their slender, often straight trunks and recognisable colours are one of the less fiddly choices for anyone looking to go beyond building generic 'trees.' Black round plates or Technic pins inside white pin connectors achieve that peeled look that birches are so famous for, while horns can be attached to leaves as branches. Jake's instantly recognisable birches set his build apart — but like most LEGO trees, they come apart easily too and the Old Birch Cottage may not be such a good spot on a windy day.

GENEVA DURAND

Build: *The Old Birch Cottage*
Builder: *Jake Hansen*
Instagram: *mountainhobbit*
Year: *2022*

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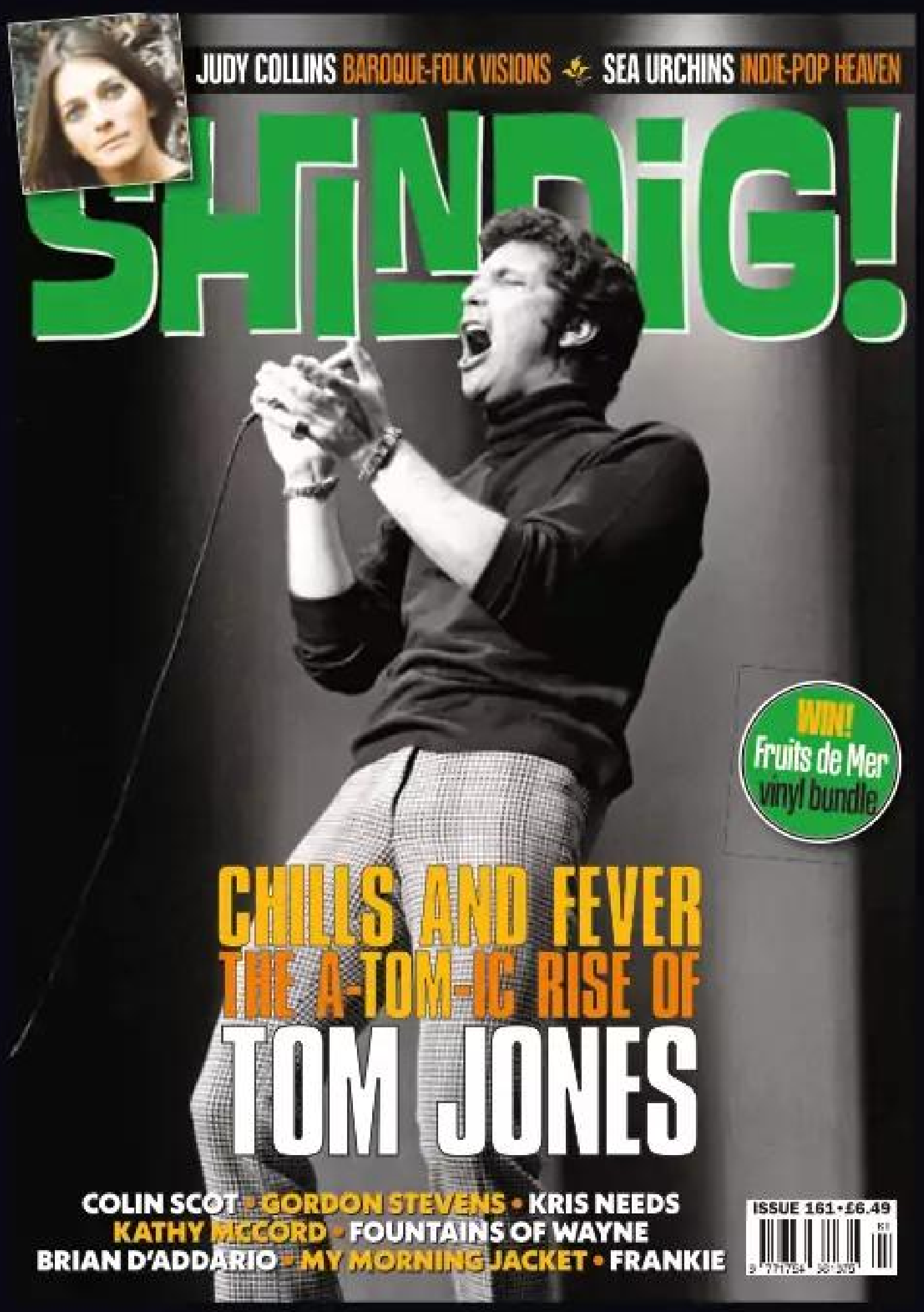
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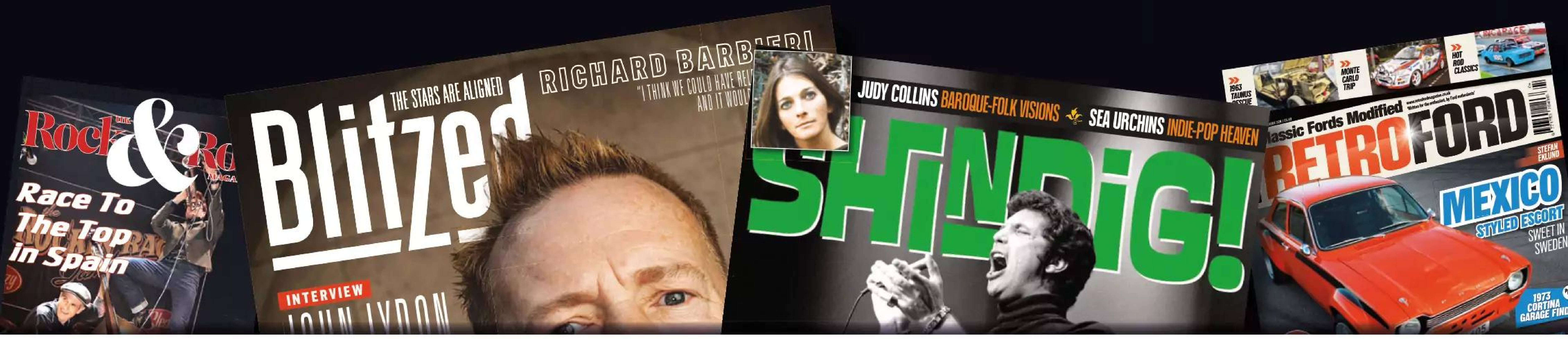

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Build & chat with...

DIDAC PEREZ SORIANO

It's a pirate's life for talented Master Builder Didac Perez Soriano and Blocks Editor Graham E. Hancock as they sit down in LEGO House to build Captain Redbeard

> "When I'm building for myself, I can do whatever I want. Here at LEGO House, all of the things that I build are for the guests."

There are no two days the same when you're part of the team at LEGO House. One day you might be constructing a stage for musical food items, another day you might be turning a soup spaceship into a physical model, then another day you might be bringing back a classic LEGO theme through beautiful illustrations. Master Builder Didac Perez Soriano tells Blocks about what it has been like to delight visitors to Billund's premiere attraction while building the venue's exclusive set, 40504 A Minifigure Tribute.

Graham E. Hancock: Where we you living before you came to Billund?

Didac Perez Soriano: I am from Barcelona, Spain. I've been living there most of my life, I've also been living in in Argentina too. I studied in England, with an Erasmus grant. That's all part of my background as a graphic designer, running graphic art departments.

The LEGO thing is something that has always been there, since I was around seven.

Graham: Do you remember what your very first set was?

Didac: Yeah, I remember the very first one. It is a little truck with a trailer and it has a boat on it. I was at school and I won a drawing contest. There was a big party in a palace with lots of kids. The prize was a notebook and some nice colouring pencils… it was cool, because I love to draw, but I was expecting something more playful, so my parents took me to a store and that was the first time that I saw a LEGO set.

I thought that it wasn't a regular toy, as I could build anything with it. My brother is also a very big LEGO fan and we always did the same. We would buy a set, we would build it, we would learn, then we would disassemble it to build our own stuff… we were making our own MOCs before we knew there was a word for it.

Graham: And did you and your brother do that harmoniously?

Didac: It was always some kind of collaboration. My brother has more of a Technic mind, the gears, the function, where I'm more about the finishing, the shaping, the colouring and stuff. Perfect team.

Graham: You mentioned you won a competition, were you drawing a lot as a child?

Didac: Yes, all of the time. It's similar to LEGO bricks. If you want to play with LEGO bricks, you just get the box, empty it out, then you play. You have everything there. With drawing, you get the paper, you get the colour pencils and you just draw. You don't need much – it's not like building models where you need the glue, the brushes, the prime materials and stuff, it's so immediate.

Graham: So Classic Space was your favourite theme – what was your experience with it?

Didac: My family was not wealthy, my parents were humble and working in regular jobs, so I was not able to get access to big sets. I always had the little sets, more like the little spaceships or the mining trucks.

A Minifigure Tribute
LEGO House
LEGO HOUSE
Home of the Brick
10+

Left to right: Didac built his own interpretation of the wooden duck.

As a fan, the Master Builder developed his own style.

Didac imbues his builds with character.

But one Christmas I got [6985] Cosmic Fleet Voyager. And it was so cool, I was so amazed by the transparent pieces, I could spend hours just looking through them.

But also, the actual spaceship was so cool because it was so arrow shaped. Then it split, there was some kind of mining cabin – because LEGO Space, of course, was always about mining, not about fighting. You had the ramp so that the little mining truck could get out and explore. I was imagining myself shrinking so I could fit into it. I remember thinking that if I could do that, it would be a little bit annoying that I would step on the studs.

Graham: There was something so exciting as a child about building this world and then picturing yourself inside it, I remember imagining that too.

When did all of the creativity, the drawing and so on, go from something that you enjoyed doing to something you thought could be a career?

Didac: I think I was, like, 16 or 17, I was in the middle school. Of course there is a point in your life when they come and put some pressure on you to think about what you want to do. I didn't know, it's so difficult to think of what you want to do for a living for the rest of your life. When you are 15 or 16, you are not thinking about the future, you are just developing yourself, going out with your friends and discovering new stuff.

That was the first time that I found out about advertising, public relationships, marketing… at that moment, I thought that it was the thing that would most closely relate to drawing. I began to study advertising and marketing and in the third year, after doing some assignments, one teacher told me, "you're in the wrong career." I was like, "oh, okay, what should I be studying?" He said, "you should be doing graphic design, because it's more related to the drawing, to the composing, the editing." I switched to graphic design, I did the four years and for a long time I was having fun with it, because it's like the illustration thing but in a very commercial, professional way.

You learn more about discipline, routines, workflow than when you are illustrating for yourself. I learned a lot about the lettering, composition, chromatic scales, et cetera. That structure makes you grow professionally, I wasn't thinking about that at that time, but now I feel like I needed all that to get where I am now.

Graham: We've built the base, I don't know why I opened the bag for the least interesting part of the set.

Didac: We could do the head. The head is so fun, because it has the –

Graham: – little island inside.

Didac: I like those details in the LEGO models, they are always doing these little jokes. [Master Builder] Stuart [Harris] is so good at them. He has been working for the LEGO Group for a long time, before LEGO House he worked at LEGOLAND parks.

When you visit World Explorer in Green Zone at LEGO House, there are a lot of jokes, very good pop culture references that are so fun – they are all ideas from Stuart. The island in this set is so good, because the pirate always has treasure on his mind.

Graham: Did you have a dark age?

Didac: Oh yes. I had a dark age, not even knowing it was called a dark age. I got to the teenage phase, I was like, "no, that's just a toy." I would like to travel back in time and say, "what are you doing Didac?!"

Graham: Barcelona must have been a vibrant place to be a teenager.

Didac: Actually, it really is. If you are a teenager you're going downtown, where the interesting stuff is going on.

But not anymore. Now I enjoy being at home and the perfect plan for me would be joining my brother and getting a cool LEGO set, watch a movie, usually something classic and nerdy, Beetlejuice or Labyrinth or Ghostbusters – 1980s material. That feeling of being with my brother, building and laughing, is really cosy. We know all the dialogue by heart… we were such nerds… we still are!

Graham: When you got back into LEGO building as an adult, did you and your brother get back into it at the same time?

Didac: I think I was maybe age 20, I didn't spend long in my dark age. Even though he is nine years younger than me, we've always shared hobbies and careers – he is a graphic designer, too. So yeah, we've been at the same pace…

Graham: It sounds amazing to be able to share all of that and have that connection.

Didac: It's so cool to have him in my life because not all of my friends are into LEGO bricks. They're into LEGO building now that I work here at LEGO House and it's so nice to see how they are gaining interest as adults. They're like, "oh, you were right, it's so relaxing, it's so fun, it's so fulfilling."

Graham: How did you come to apply for the role at LEGO House?

Didac: I really developed myself, my skills as an AFOL, maybe three years ago. I was working in this large company and I was struggling a lot because my job wasn't about the graphic design so much anymore and more about running a graphic design department.

So at that time I was using LEGO bricks like therapy. Sometimes I was

> "The fulfilment that you have when you do little pieces is more frequent and it helps you to develop a style."

just sorting LEGO elements, almost as a meditation. When I came back from work, I sat at the table, laid out all of my LEGO pieces and most of the time I was mixing them just to sort them again.

We had a lot of LEGO bricks, and I was like, "okay, I should build something." Every now and then I built something. I have some ADHD and I cannot achieve long term goals, like big projects, big houses or big dioramas, because I lose the attention.

So I began to do little stuff. The fulfilment that you have when you do little pieces is more frequent and it helps you to develop a style. And that's what I like about LEGO building, I can take all the graphic design that I learned, all the drawing, all the cartoons that I have seen and transform it to LEGO models. It's not a toy anymore, it's some kind of tool to develop this creativity inside your head. I began doing little upscaled bricks as cartoon characters, anthropomorphised.

After a while, I had a good collection. I thought I should upload it to social media, to Instagram, I bought a photographic studio, one of those that you can unfold, and I began to do nice pictures of them. When I had those uploaded, I had a portfolio.

Then in a serendipity-ish way, I found that LEGO House and Stuart were looking for a 'Junior Master Builder'. I thought, 'I'm not a junior anymore, I'm 46!' but I just wanted to apply to let the LEGO Group know me. Then one day, I received an email, and they asked me for an interview online. I wasn't expecting that at all!

The interview was so fun. We spent more time laughing and talking about stuff that was not related to the job than the job itself. Then, a while later, they contacted me again and invited me to visit Billund for an interview. At that moment, I began to freak out because it was becoming something real.

I had low expectations, but thought it was worth it, if only for the experience of getting to know them. At the interview, they made me build an animal in 45 minutes. It was such pressure! Until then my ideas just popped up and I had all the time in the world to build them. So my test build was really lame, I hadn't built something that bad since I was 10 years old. But I defended it to death!

The rest of the interview was really good, but I left thinking that they were not going to call me again. It took a while, but one day the phone was ringing and it was a very long number… not a Spanish numner, for sure. It was Mike Ganderton, who is now my boss, and he said, "okay, do you have a pencil and a paper?" He began to tell me, "okay, this is your salary, your assignments, you're going to have these holidays…" I was in my former job, so I couldn't freak out, I had to make sure I didn't shout or cry. All of my friends at work who knew about the process saw through my poker face.

After that, everything was so quick. It has been a year and a half now and I feel like it has been five years, six years, it has been so intense. I'm learning a lot by working with Stuart, which is one of the best things. I like to say that he's Batman and I'm Robin.

Graham: What was it like during your very first days here, moving from Barcelona?

Didac: I could quite not believe what was going on. The first months that I stayed here in Denmark, it felt like a holiday, a workshop or a dream… then eventually I'd be going back home or waking up! But I was looking for an apartment, learning about the new job, getting the new assignments, working with Stuart, being part of the new team.

The people at LEGO House were so warm and welcoming. They were making jokes with me in Spanish. It was so charming. They care a lot. They make you feel like you are a family member – in a family of 250 people. You go to the Christmas parties and you meet cousins that you didn't know you had.

And the icing of the cake was meeting Lila, my partner. She is the reason that I am convinced I did well in moving to Denmark…

Graham: How soon did you get your hands on bricks and start working on specific projects?

Didac: I began with a huge assignment, the changing of the showcases.

Left to right: For the space campaign, Didac transformed children's pictures into LEGO builds.

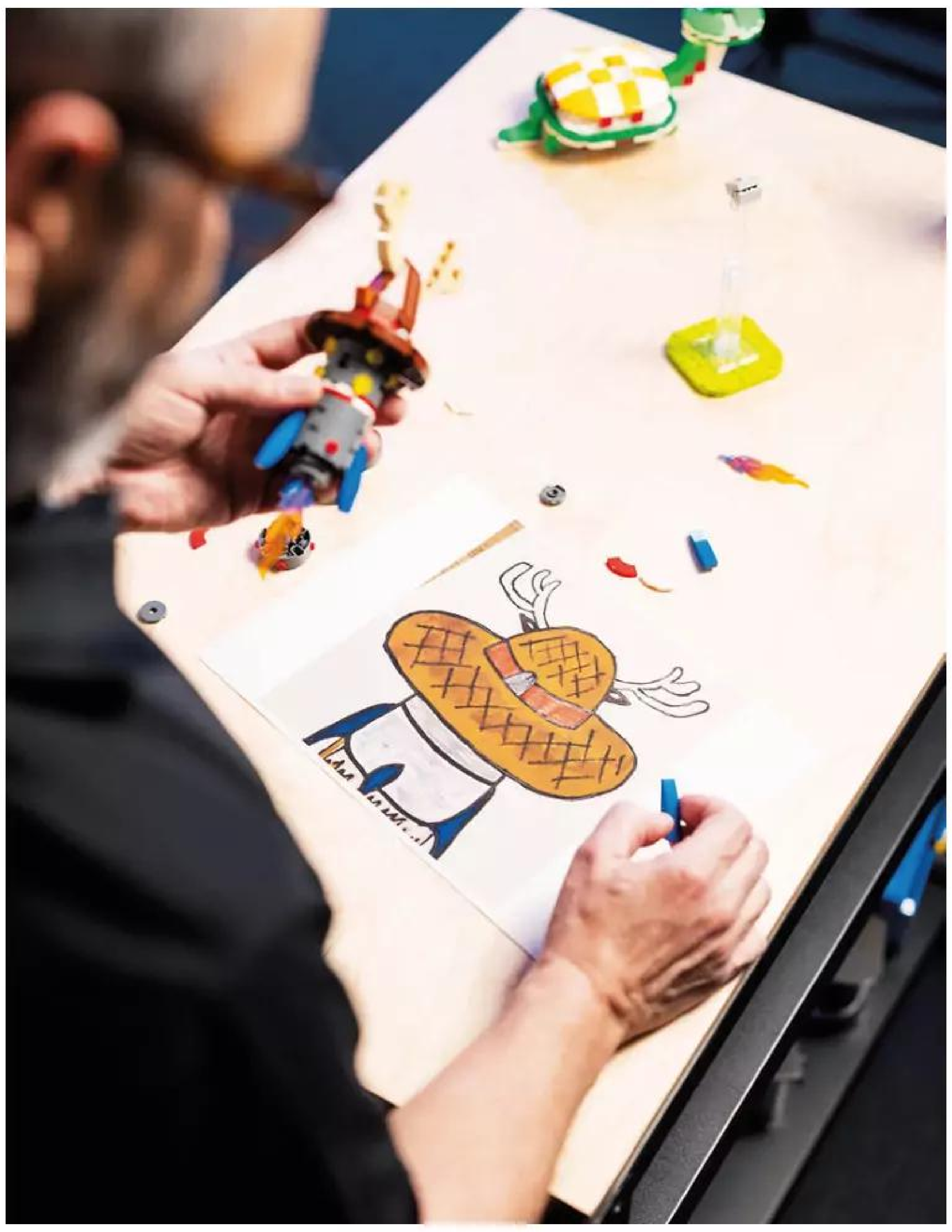
The models then became spectacular drone displays.

Mike the monkey becomes a ninja.

Surf's up in Heartlake City.

Didac brought Fabuland back in a series of illustrations.

The Fabuland characters visit LEGO House and take home a photo.



> "The warehouse in Innovation House... it's like a LEGO paradise, it is so overwhelming."

We have cabinets in LEGO House's experience zones where we display fan creations. On the LEGO Ideas website we share the challenges each year, we explain that we're going to change the builds over. We give three new subjects or themes, they are quite broad, because we want people to be creative.

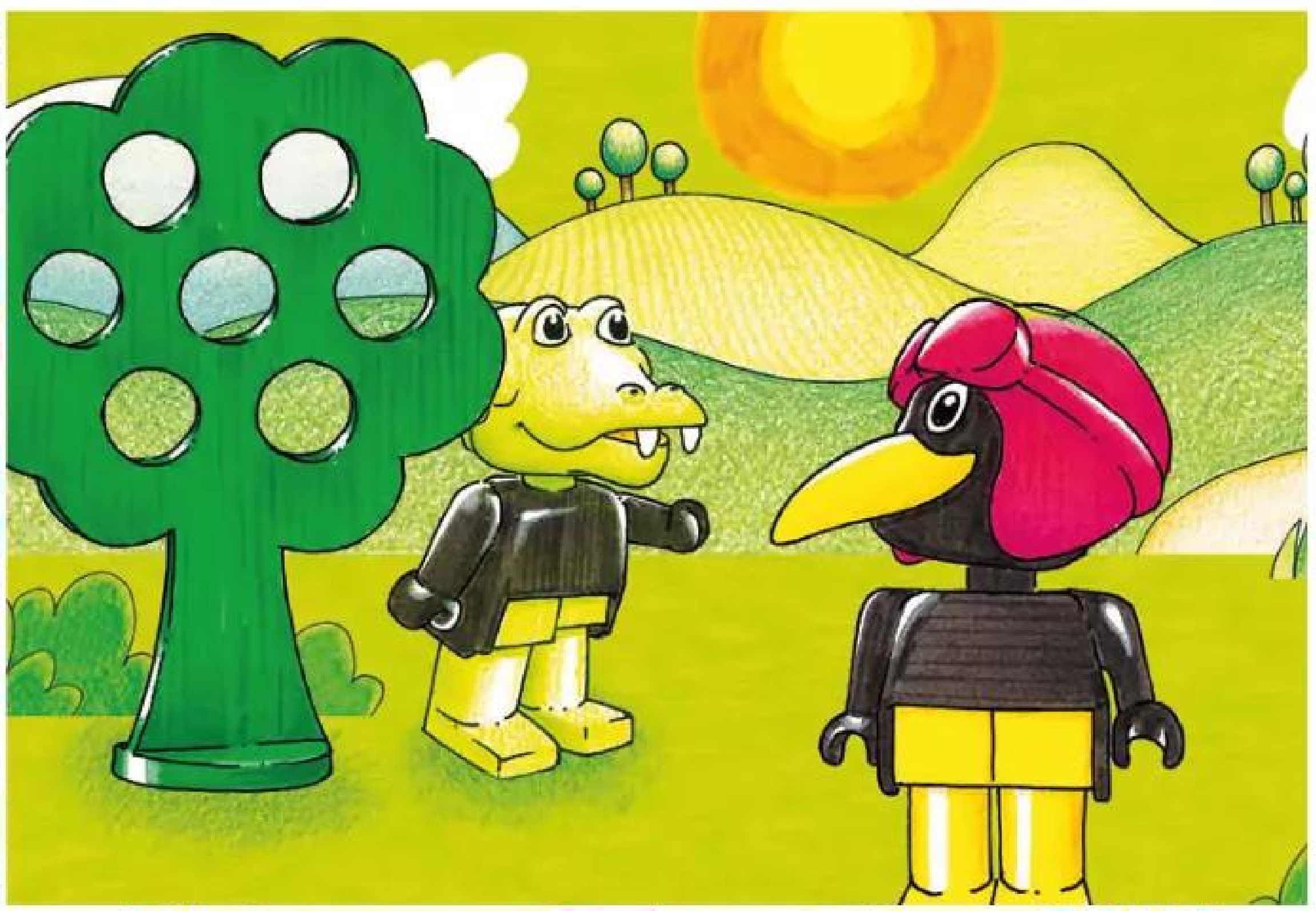
All of the submissions come in and then we do the selection – we select 70 of them among others chosen by other Ideas users. The showcases are huge, we have a lot of space. We contact the builders, we explain how to deliver, how to pack the models – the postal service people do not take the same care that you do with your own MOCs. When they arrive here we have to rebuild them, because most of them need to be rebuilt. I rebuilt so many builds from the fans than I was named the Master re-Builder.

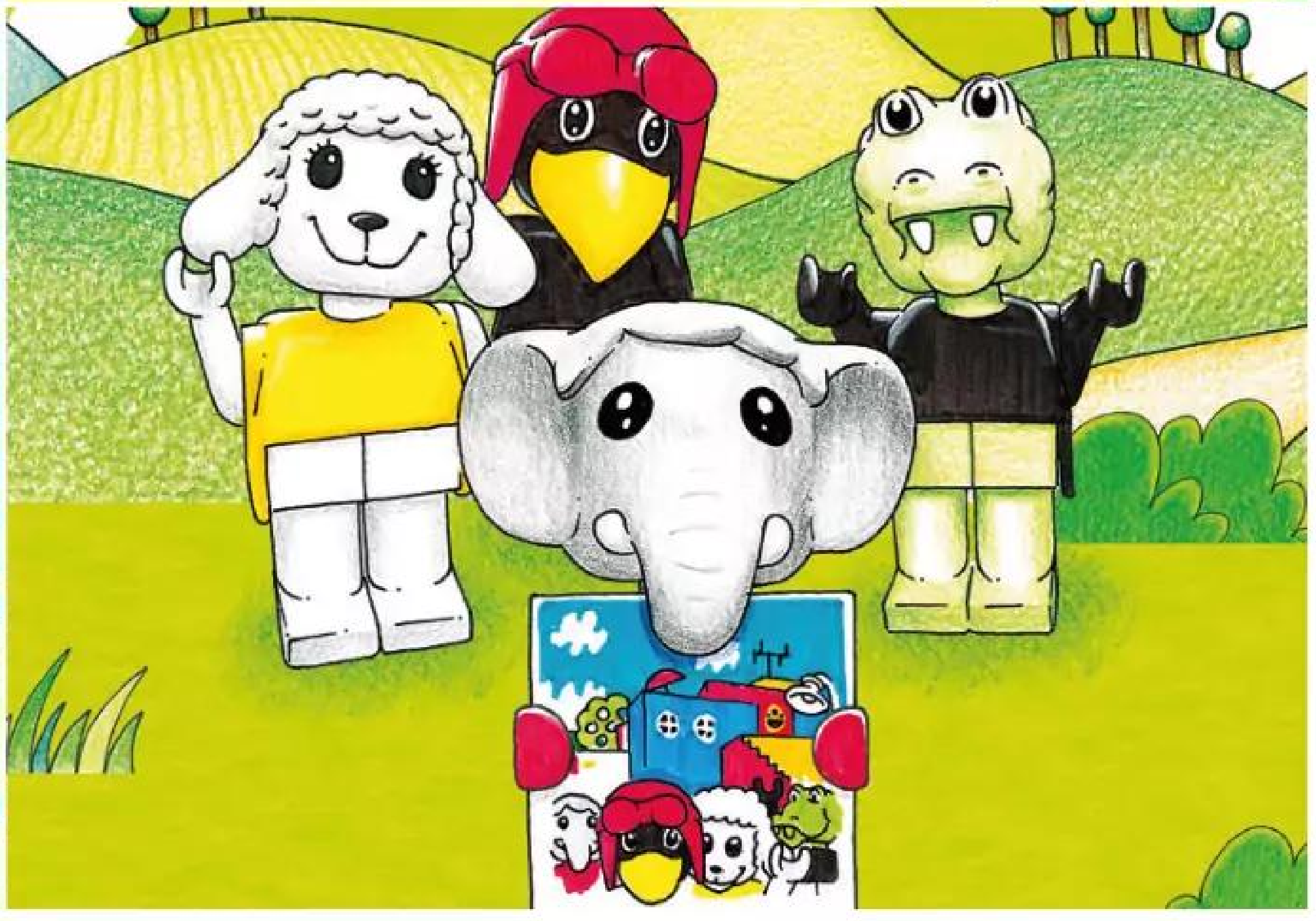
Graham: Do you rebuild them based on photos?

Didac: LEGO Ideas challenges don't ask for the building instructions, so what we have are pictures with all the angles from the outside, but not the inner structure. It's quite a challenge to figure out how to get to the final result.

Graham: I guess you feel a responsibility to the builder to get it right.

Didac: Yeah totally, because as an AFOL I know that when you finish a MOC it's like your child.





I say a lot of times that it's like working with TNT – at any moment, any movement, any coughing and the build might break. I have to rebuild them in the basement then put them in a trolley, then take the elevator and try to roll the trolley smoothly and bring them upstairs.

When we get in the zones, the shelves that are more or less my height are fine. But I'm short, so the ones we put on the upper shelves, I have to get a stool and fight against gravity and balance… I'm a ninja by now.

Graham: What were the first things you built yourself for LEGO House?

Didac: One of the first things that I'm most proud of building were some new 'Mike the monkeys'.

Graham: That's the Creator monkey right [31019 Forest Animals], who pops up all over the Tree of Creativity?

Didac: Exactly. Just two months after I arrived, we changed some of the branches on the Tree of Creativity. We had two new ones that year, a new one for NINJAGO and a new one for Friends. And I got to build Mike the monkeys, themed for each of them.

I got the official Creator set, then customised it for each theme. It's really fun and creative. It was really fun; I did a ninja Mike and a Californian puddle surfer Michelle (she's a girl). Every time family and friends visit, I'm so proud to show them the first thing that I built for the House.

When the branches get changed though… that's a show. When they built the tree at the beginning, they thought about how to change the branches using platforms, but there isn't the space because of the stairs that surround the tree. So you have people hanging from the ceiling, from the beams, and they can't break anything.

On each of the branches there is a square that is the space for the diorama – but the branch is not square, you have the leaf shapes. So there is a gap where the square base stops. I was on the on the gangway with a laser pointing to where the guys hanging should put green plates to cover that gap. The guy was hanging there, I was saying, "put one there, put one there," he was asking, "here? Here?" It was so funny.

Graham: There was a really cool space campaign you worked on, where the ideas children had about space travel were brought to life. What was the process there?

Didac: The marketing team came to me and explained that we were going to do this contest. They were going to ask kids in different schools in different countries about their vision of travelling in space and galactic exploration in the future, what they think it's going to be.

Something that's very curious and fun is that all of the kids are so into food, no matter where in the world they are. I guess kids are discovering new food and when they find something they like they want it all the time. So we had a lot of food themed spaceships.

For example, there was an ice cream rocket, a pizza U.F.O., a smoothie lunar module, a tomato soup spaceship. Children are so creative!

I got the eight finalist drawings, then the challenge for me was to take those drawings and convert them into LEGO builds. I couldn't do a super complicated spaceship, as the next phase of the contest was another challenge in itself.

We sent these LEGO builds to a drone shows company and they converted the builds into digital versions and programmed the drones to represent them at a big event in New York, at night.

Graham: It's so nice to be involved in something that, because as a child, when would you get your idea to be in front of you in the sky with drones? That's something they'll never forget.

Didac: That's something I realised this year. LEGO House guests are so willing to show what they build. We have shelves everywhere where they can show their creations. So imagine getting to show your spaceship with drones over New York…

Graham: 40506 LEGO Fabuland Tribute is this year's new exclusive and there are some beautiful illustrations in the instruction book. Can you tell me about those?

Didac: Oh, thanks! Yes, Stuart was designing the exclusive set and as Fabuland is about storytelling, he thought it would be nice to have some illustrations reproducing the original building instructions from the 1980s.

I enjoy illustrating to a specific style a lot. It's quite curious – you may think this colouring book style is easy to do, but it isn't!

I had to study it a lot, especially understanding how they drew the lines, the textures they got with pencils and markers… I figured out how they did all the buildings, because they were storytelling but at the same time showing you how to build it. So even though it's a childish drawing, you need to recognise all of the elements, where the pieces need to go so you can assemble it. The design team at that time took photos of the models and they traced them, maybe they used light tables, but you can tell that that it's not drawn by hand.

The cutest part is the minifigures were showing you how to build the set!

Graham: And you did the rough sketch for the characters visiting LEGO House?

Didac: Usually this kind of ideas is Stuart's. Stuart knows what the people want to see. Fabuland is about storytelling and it's about these four characters visiting LEGO House. We did some vignettes, like a storybook, how they get the invitation, how the friends join the trip.

We were talking about drawing LEGO House in a Fabuland style. Actually, it's super opposite to Fabuland – it's all white, all square with no details. So we thought about using the colours of the Fabuland buildings and putting some details like the windows and doors on there. We created a nice composition for an exclusive art print too.

I'm so happy and honoured to have been able to participate in it. It's something that is very deep in the hearts of the fans.

Graham: What are you working on now?

Didac: A few months ago, we had the privilege of welcoming a very special guest to LEGO House – William, a 12-year-old boy with an extraordinary imagination and a big dream. William had been diagnosed with cancer and during his visit, he shared his wish to build a LEGO model of a PET/CT scanner – a machine he was very familiar with from his hospital treatments.

He told us he wanted to help other children understand how the machine works and maybe make it feel a little less scary. His vision was to one day have this model shared with hospitals around the world.

We began building together in the studio – it was truly inspiring to see his creativity and building skills. Sadly, William passed away before we could finish the project together.

That's why it's now incredibly important to us to carry on his dream and complete the LEGO PET/CT scanner in his memory. It's a way for us to honour his imagination and courage – and hopefully, to bring comfort and play to other children going through similar experiences.

Graham: That is really special and demonstrates what LEGO bricks mean to people and how they can connect people. Do you often get to collaborate with people outside of the organisation?

Didac: We did a collab with Allyson Gail from LEGO Masters USA. She was so fun in the show, always singing with her partner. She builds a lot of food with little eyes, it's super cartoonish. The build was for Brickaccino, Allyson loves singing and loves food, so we decided to build of band that's on tour and they are performing at LEGO House.

Allyson built food – a coffee, a croissant, an apple and a bagel, we asked her to build instruments for each character. Instead of putting all of the characters just in a window case, I thought let's do a concert stage with the speakers, with the logo built in bricks. We put all the characters on there and it was great storytelling, a real collaboration.

Graham: What is the biggest difference since you've been building professionally to when you were building as a fan?

Didac: When I'm building for myself, I can do whatever I want. It's very important to build to for yourself as a deep fan. But here at LEGO House, all the things that I build are for the guests.

I cannot do very fancy stuff or super weird techniques. I like to build studless for myself, but at LEGO House, we want people to know that it's made from the bricks.

One of the best parts is having access to the bricks catalogue; the first time I visited the warehouse I almost cried, really. It is every LEGO fan's dream come true… when you build as a fan, not having all of the bricks forces you to be more creative to achieve the same – or even better – results with what you have. That makes you sharper, actually… but having access to all of the bricks is pretty nice!

And of course, learning day by day with one of the best Master Builders since Dagny Holm.

Graham: Do you have any final reflections, looking back on a year and a bit here at LEGO House?

Didac: It has changed my life. I never imagined something like this could happen to me.

When they told me that they were hiring me, I didn't hesitate – I said, "yes, let's do it." It has gone by so fast, it has gone from being a new experience to becoming my routine, my job. But come on, it's LEGO bricks! I can't imagine being this happy anywhere else.

Love
Allyson Gail
&
The Tasty Treats

“You had to pretend that these are the very same building instructions from the 1980s.”

Above left: *LEGO Masters contestant Allyson Gail collaborated with LEGO House on a special project.*

Above: *Spring is a time for blooms in LEGO House.*

1993

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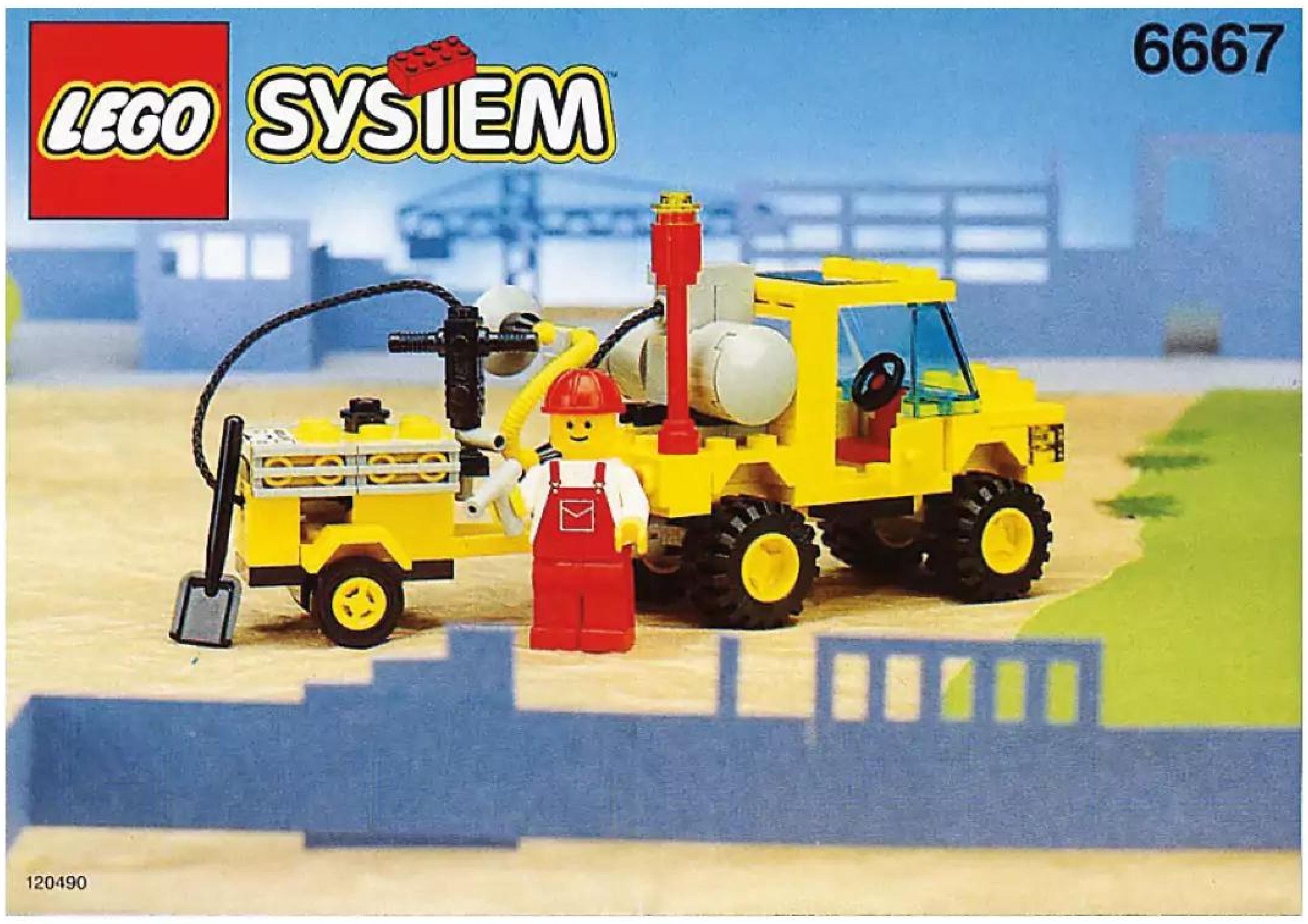
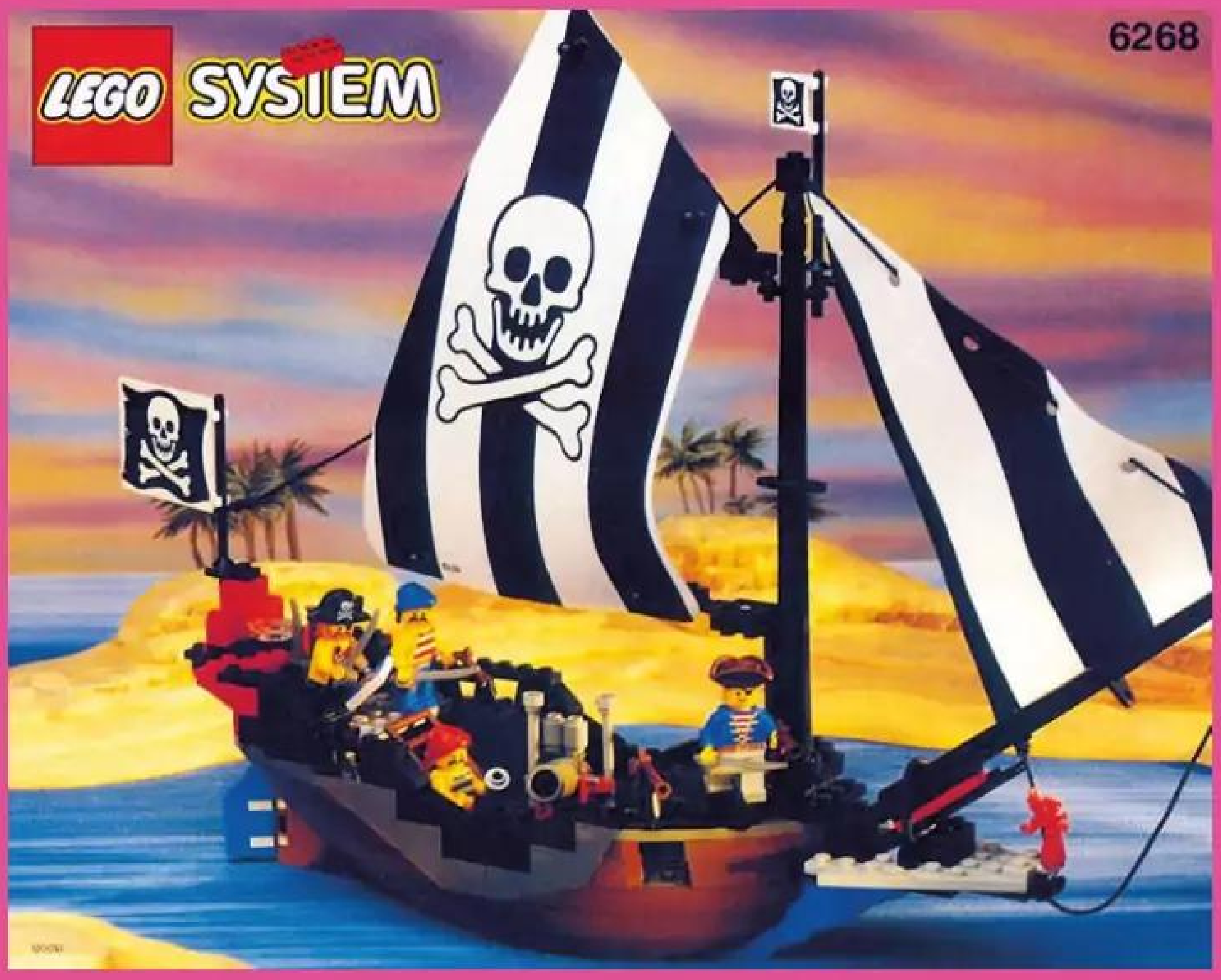
6667 Pothole Patcher

Never let it be said that the LEGO Group doesn't know how to drill down into the mundanity of modern life. Yes, LEGO Town may be rampant with crime and eternally ablaze, but there are also potholes to be patched – or at least there were in 1993. Given fans have never seen anything like 6667 Pothole Patcher again, this particular civil servant was presumably so effective in his role that the good citizens have enjoyed smooth roads ever since. Maybe it isn't so realistic after all...



FOR UNDER £50 YOU COULD BUY...



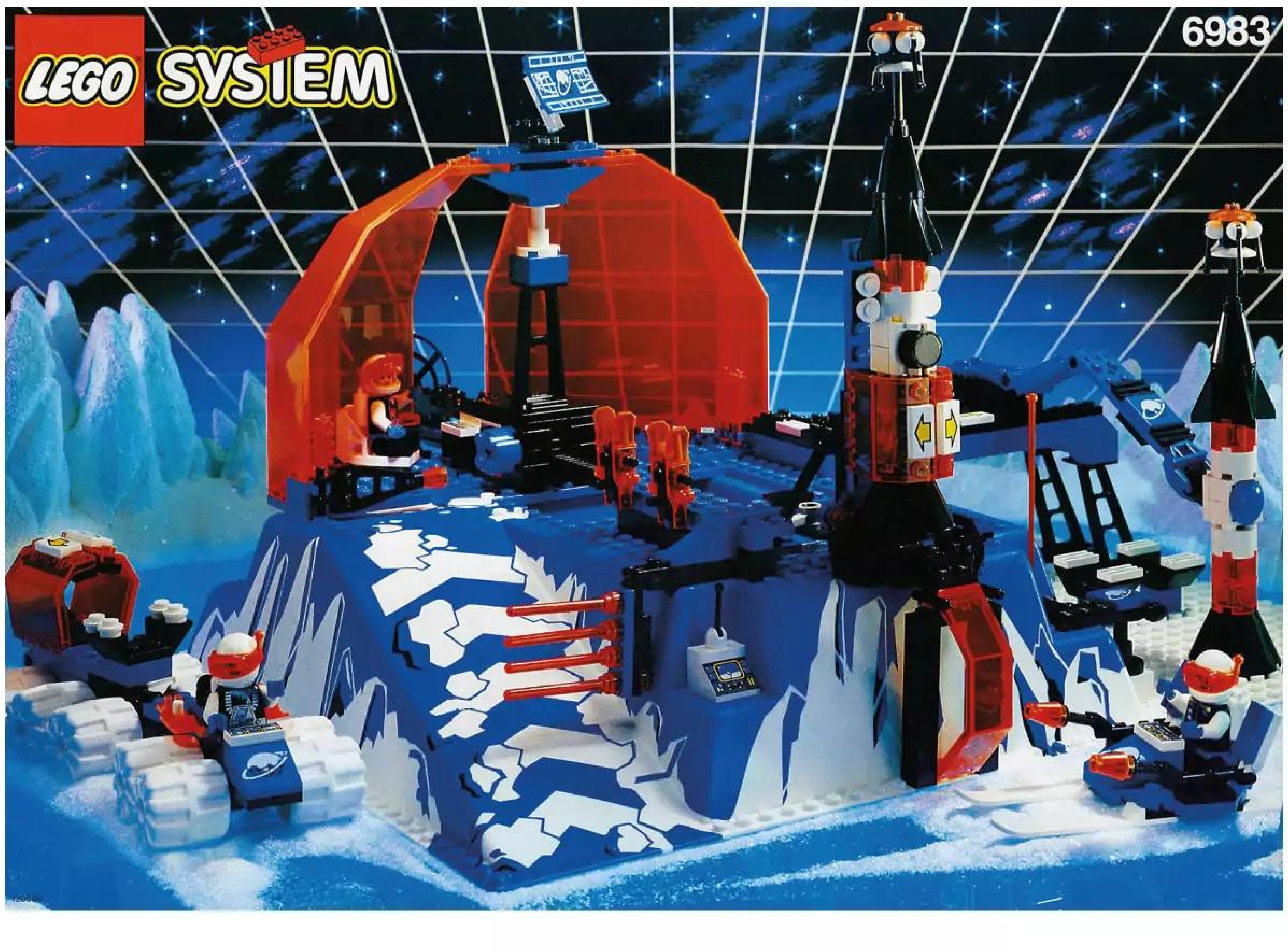
6268 Renegade Runner

Pirate ships are so few and far between these days that it's easy to forget they were not only once common, but even came in a bunch of different sizes. That wasn't necessarily to their benefit, though: the legendary Renegade Runner has earned what you'd call a mixed reputation over the past three decades, championed for its minifigure selection, cloth sails and nimble ship yet simultaneously derided for lacking a wheel and anchor. But as long as this crew didn't mind letting the wind take them where it may, they were in for a jolly old time on the seven seas.

FOR UNDER £100 YOU COULD BUY...

6983 Ice Station Odyssey

If Blade Runner, Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome and Soylent Green have taught audiences anything, it's that predicting the future is a fool's game. So it was with Ice Planet 2002, a LEGO Space subtheme that debuted in 1993 with big ambitions for where the human race might end up less than a decade later. While we've still not ventured further than the Moon, flagship set 6983 Ice Station Odyssey was busy dreaming up what we as a species might hope to establish on a distant icy planet. The answer? Giant trans-neon orange domes, a huge raised baseplate and rugged vehicles.

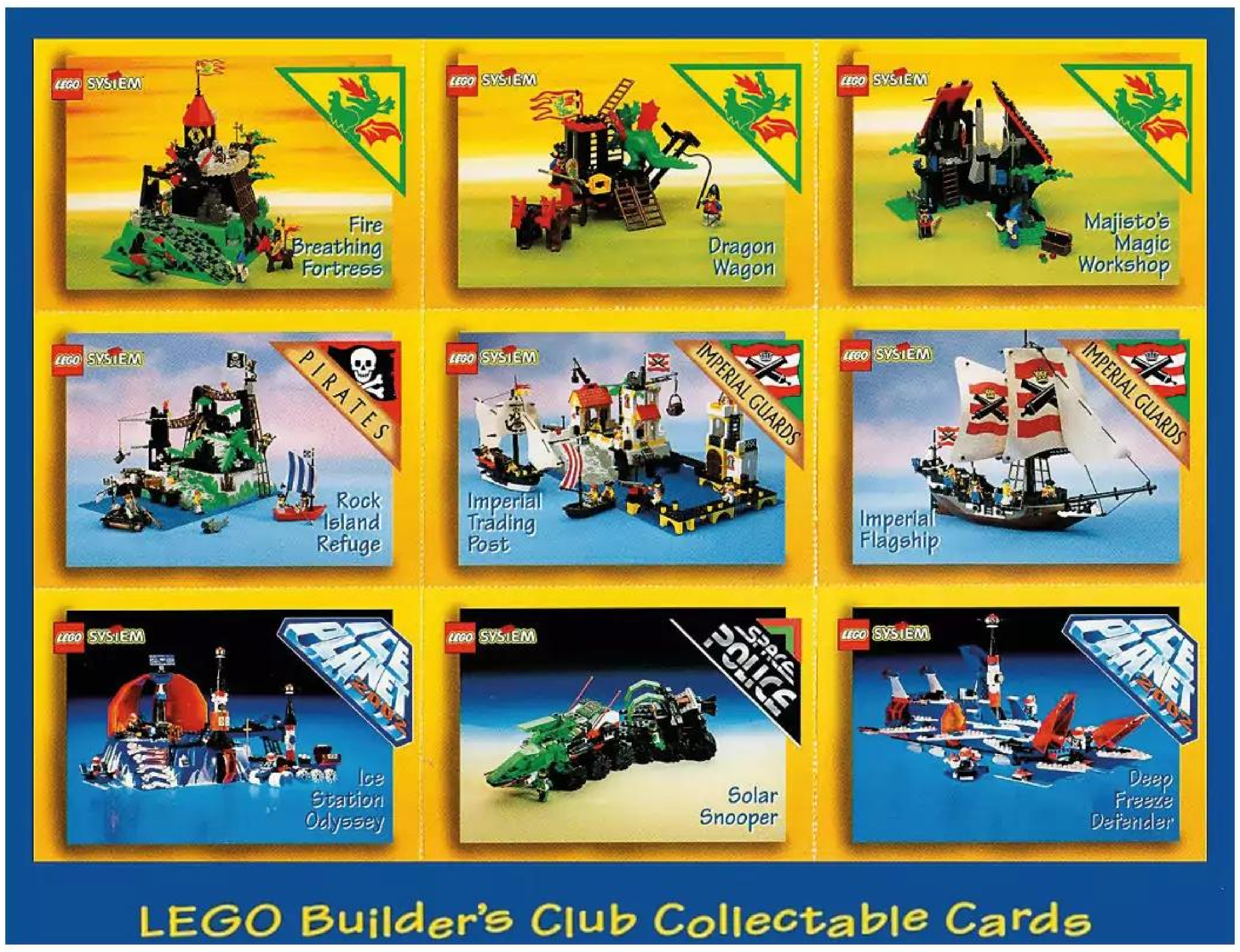


BREAKING NEW GROUND

By the early 1990s, the LEGO Group had erected a total of four factories in Billund, with the latest – Kornmarken – operating at full capacity. But unlimited growth and full capacity are terms that do not mix, so the company broke first ground on a brand new factory in Billund in 1993, which would come to be known as Rugmarken (at some point you have to stop and wonder when Billund will be 100% factory). This facility pumped out building sets for 13 years before the LEGO Group rented it out to fellow Danish business Sanistål in 2006. All that is left there now is a single office building.

GOTTA COLLECT 'EM ALL

If you thought the recent LEGO Star Wars trading card craze was the first time the LEGO Group had successfully capitalised on FOMO from card collectors, you'd be wrong. Back in 1993, the company included one of nine limited edition cards with the LEGO Builder's Club magazine, featuring Dragon Knights, Imperial Guards, Ice Planet 2002 and Space Police sets. Full sheets of all nine cards did find their way into the wild, and you can now pick up this quaint curio for as 'little' as £60 on eBay… if you're so inclined.


LEGO SYSTEM
Fire Breathing Fortress
Dragon Wagon
Majisto's Magic Workshop
PIRATES
Rock Island Refuge
IMPERIAL GUARDS
Imperial Trading Post
Imperial Flagship
ICE PLANET
Ice Station Odyssey
SPACE POLICE
Solar Snooper
Deep Freeze Defender
LEGO Builder's Club Collectable Cards

ARCH ATTACK

If you've built a LEGO set at some point in the past 32 years, chances are you'll recognise the humble 1x12x3 arch. Included in some 194 sets in one form or another, this storied element first appeared in 1993, in sets including 6076 Dark Dragon's Den and 6082 Fire Breathing Fortress. The LEGO Group tweaked the mould around 2014, but this favoured piece of LEGO Castle builders is still finding its way into sets to this day, most recently in the likes of 60460 No Limits: Race Car Ramp and 76435 Hogwarts Castle: The Great Hall.

CHRIS WHARFE

Meanwhile, outside the LEGO bubble…

HIGHEST GROSSING MOVIE
JURASSIC PARK

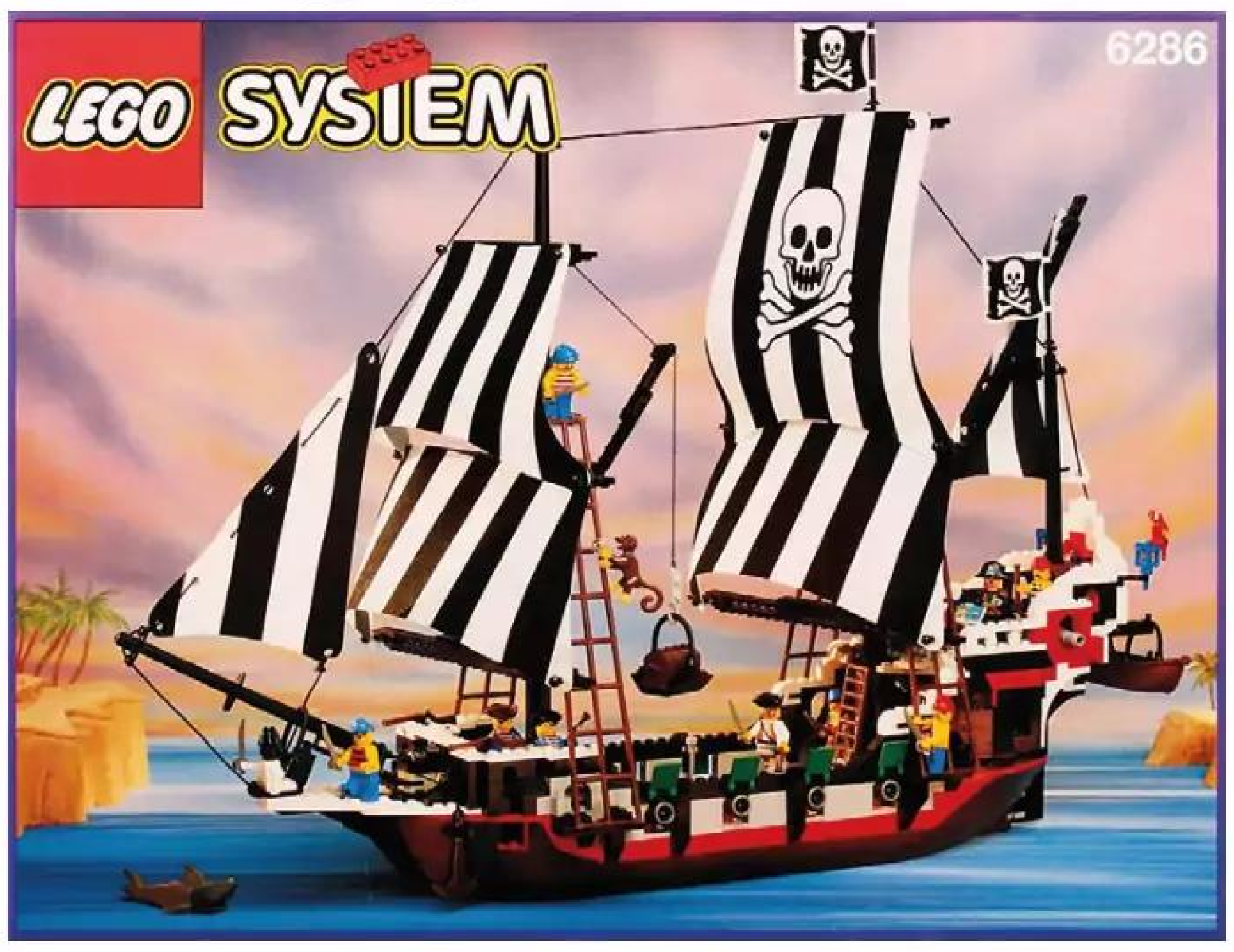
BEST SELLING ALBUM
THE BODYGUARD: ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK (WHITNEY HOUSTON)

BEST SELLING GAME
STREET FIGHTER II

BEST SELLING BOOK
THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY

THE ASHES WINNING TEAM
AUSTRALIA

Biggest Set


LEGO SYSTEM
6286

6286 Skull's Eye Schooner (912 pieces)

90

SETS RELEASED

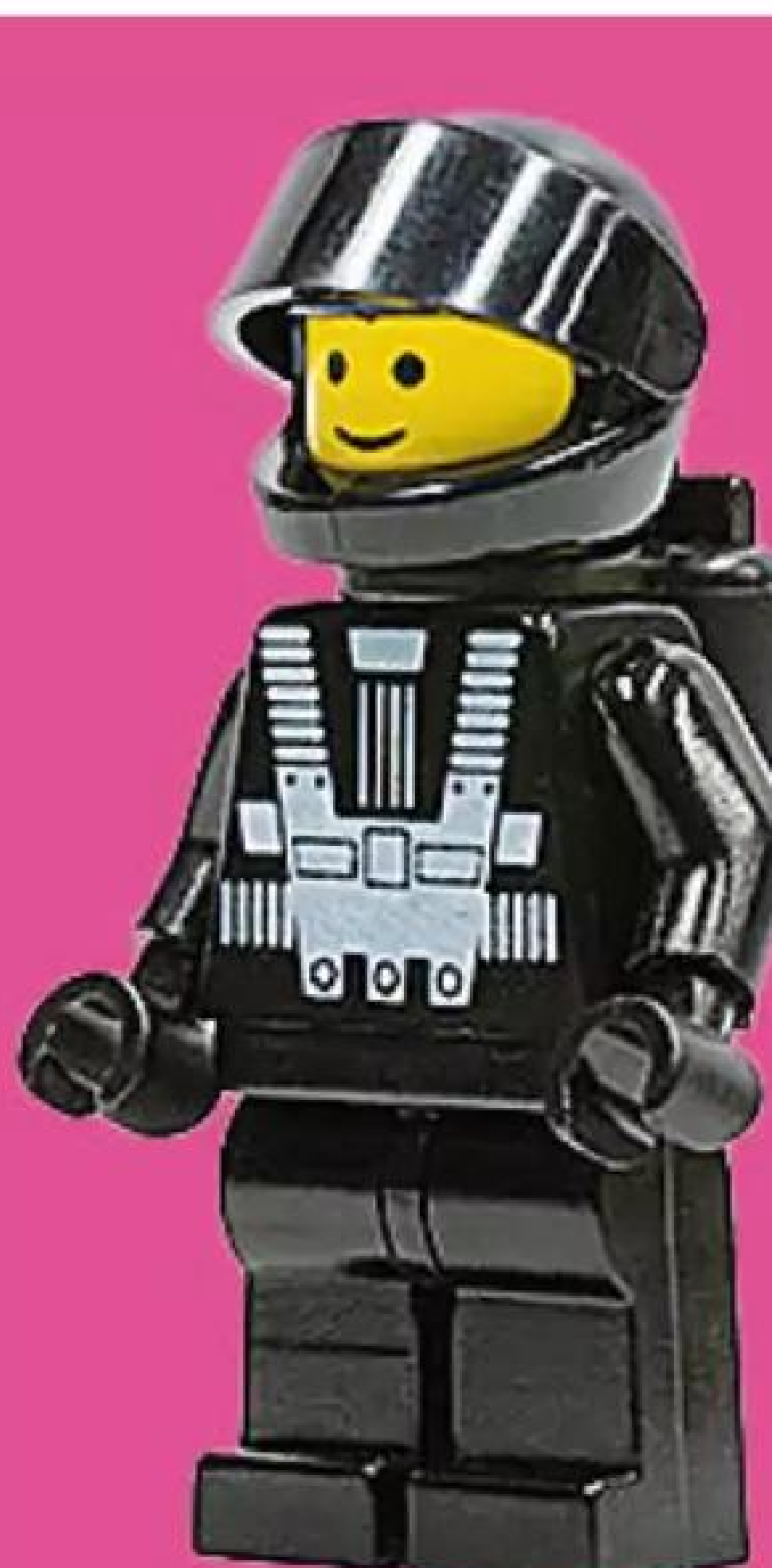
Classic Catalogue

Time Cruising

Travelling back through the years to look at some of the most memorable LEGO items

MINIFIGURE

1987
BLACKTRON I ASTRONAUT



How do you communicate villainy in a galaxy of permanently etched smiles? Dress your bad guys in black, of course. That was the pitch behind Blacktron, the first LEGO Space theme to sprinkle some conflict into the previously peaceful exploration of the brick-built cosmos. The late 1980s range was staffed by the iconic Blacktron I astronaut (so-called retroactively thanks to the introduction of Blacktron II in 1991) and while its basic genetic makeup resembled the Classic Space astronauts, there was a clear divergence in aesthetic here.

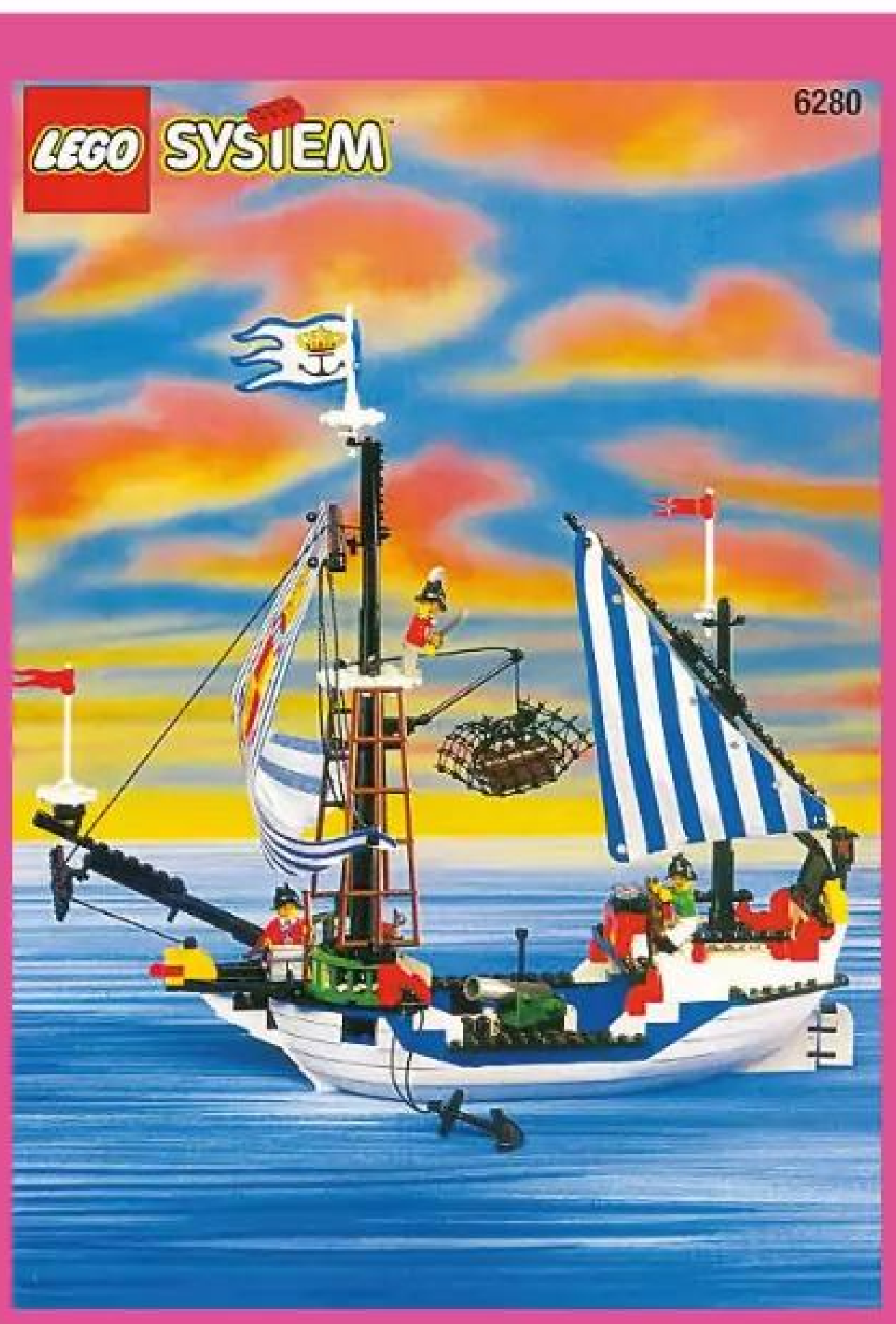
The smaller racing helmet stepped in for the larger, visor-less version worn by other astronauts in order to give Blacktron's personnel an even more treacherous black visor – surely nobody capable of wrongdoing would ever want to hide their face? – while the torso swapped out the simple Classic Space logo for a more detailed flight suit. The air tanks were still present and correct, though – as was that perpetual classic smiley face, with unique minifigure head printing still a couple of years away.

Early LEGO lore also played its part in expanding Blacktron's backstory as evildoers in space, pitting them in direct opposition to Futuron, the only other named Classic Space faction at the time. Later lore helped, too – Blacktron II more firmly established these guys as wrong 'uns, as further explored by 2024's space-themed Collectible Minifigures series.

But while modern Blacktron remakes have stuck firmly to the design language of the original minifigures, the smiles that mask a thousand sins once again plastered across their plastic faces, the LEGO Group did take one opportunity to more plainly reflect the personalities of these astronauts. The LEGO Movie 2 Videogame's playable Blacktron Spaceman combines a snarling expression with stubble, crow's feet and eyebrows – all the hallmarks of someone up to no good, apparently.

THEME

1996
IMPERIAL ARMADA



The early days of LEGO Pirates were defined first by the blue-coated Imperial Soldiers, then by the red-coated Imperial Guards. But often overlooked are their short-lived successors, the Imperial Armada, who left behind the colonial-era British and French inspiration of their predecessors and looked instead towards the 16th and 17th-century Spanish conquistadors.

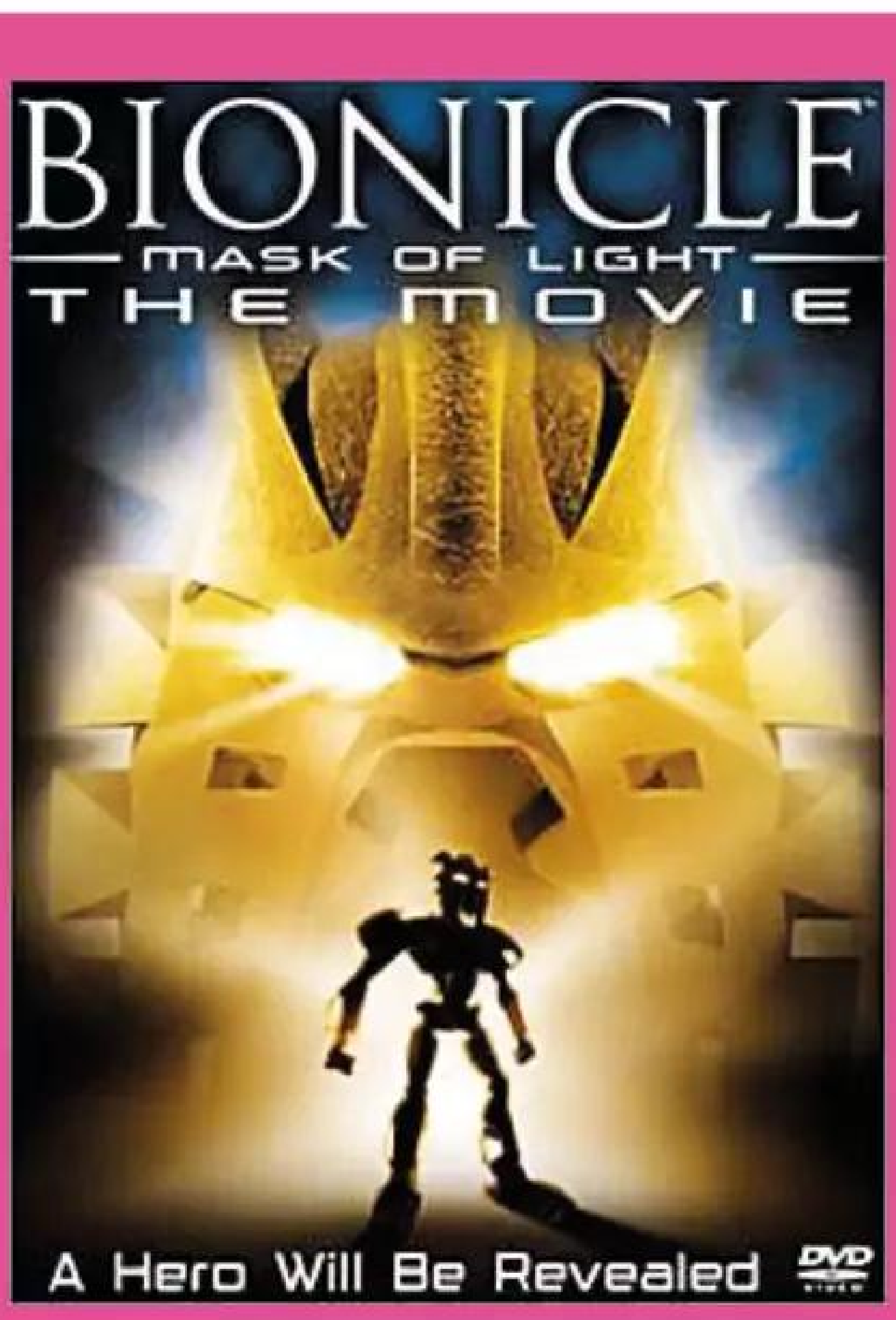
Easily identified by their helmets, these soldiers comprised the smallest subtheme of LEGO Pirates to ever set sail from Billund, totalling just two of their own sets in 1996 – 6244 Armada Sentry and 6280 Armada Flagship – along with a one-for-one re-release of the larger vessel in 2001. Imperial Armada minifigures did make appearances in a handful of limited 1997 releases, however, adding a few more strings to their bow.

Among those familiar faces were named characters Captain Valiant and Sergeant Speedy, along with the mysterious Admiral, who was never formally named – though not for the lack of trying. The US LEGO Mania Magazine held a contest to decide his moniker, allowing readers to choose from Billy Cannonball Cordoba or Don Diego de LEGO – or write in with their own suggestion. A subsequent issue highlighted three of the write-in submissions but failed to identify a clear winner, so the Admiral has remained anonymous ever since.

Several Imperial Armada characters and minifigures have shown up in video games over the years, giving this range life beyond its small sample of sets – and if you're interested in owning a complete collection of a single LEGO Pirates subtheme, this is probably the place to start. Both mainline sets are retro time capsules of that mid to late 1990s-era simplified design, only with lashings of colours rarely glimpsed among jolly rogers and pirate ships. Fun, fresh and funky – adjectives no-one never expected to be used to describe 17th-century conquistadors.

ANIMATION

2003
BIONICLE: MASK OF LIGHT



A movie based on a toy is the sort of thing that sounds like it would never work on paper, but the LEGO Group has proved naysayers wrong at least twice over now – most famously in 2014's The LEGO Movie, but first in BIONICLE: Mask of Light. This entirely computer-generated adaptation of the constraction theme's 2003 storyline came together in a record 13 months through the efforts of multiple studios working collaboratively and went on to receive favourable reviews as well as industry recognition at the Saturn Awards and Golden Reel Awards.

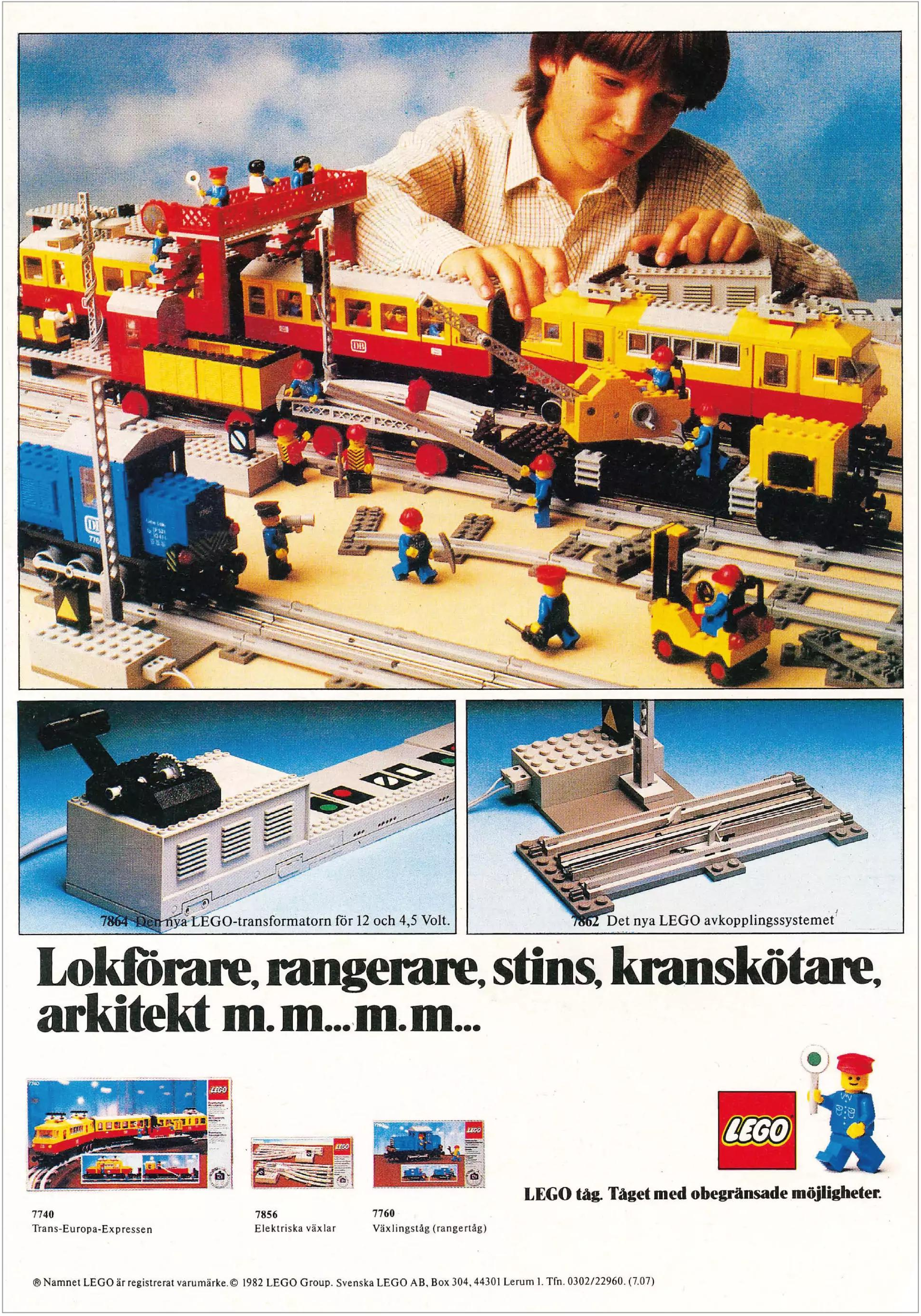
It's a nice success story for one of the themes that helped to bring the LEGO Group back from the brink of bankruptcy in the early 2000s, serving up a fun and briskly-paced animated adventure that sees the Toa of Light emerge to defeat the evil spirit Makuta and awaken his brother Mata Nui. The movie was predictably accompanied by a range of tie-in merchandise – including new BIONICLE sets based on the film's original characters, a video game, a novelisation and more.

You can trace the origins of Mask of Light to 2001, when BIONICLE exploded in popularity and film studios began lining up at the LEGO Group's door to license it for a movie adaptation. The Danish company ultimately decided to retain creative control – a strategic decision later repeated with the Warner Bros. LEGO movies – and searched far and wide for an animation studio capable of taking the project on.

That honour went to Creative Capers, which then outsourced some of its work to Taiwanese company CGCG, while post-production was handled by two different studios. Despite the many different companies with fingers in the production, Mask of Light debuted on schedule and did well enough that it spawned prequels and sequels. If we had a penny for every time a movie based on a toy exceeded expectations…

CHRIS WHARFE

This 1982 advertisement for LEGO Trains focuses on 7740 Inter-City Passenger Train Set.



7864 Den nya LEGO-transformatorn för 12 och 4,5 Volt.

7862 Det nya LEGO avkopplingssystemet

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8964 ***Theme:*** *Power Miners* / ***Year:*** *2009* / ***Average selling price new:*** *£331*/ ***Average selling price used:*** *£112* / ***Recommended age:*** *8-14* / ***Minifigures:*** *5* / ***Pieces:*** *706*

Titanium Command Rig

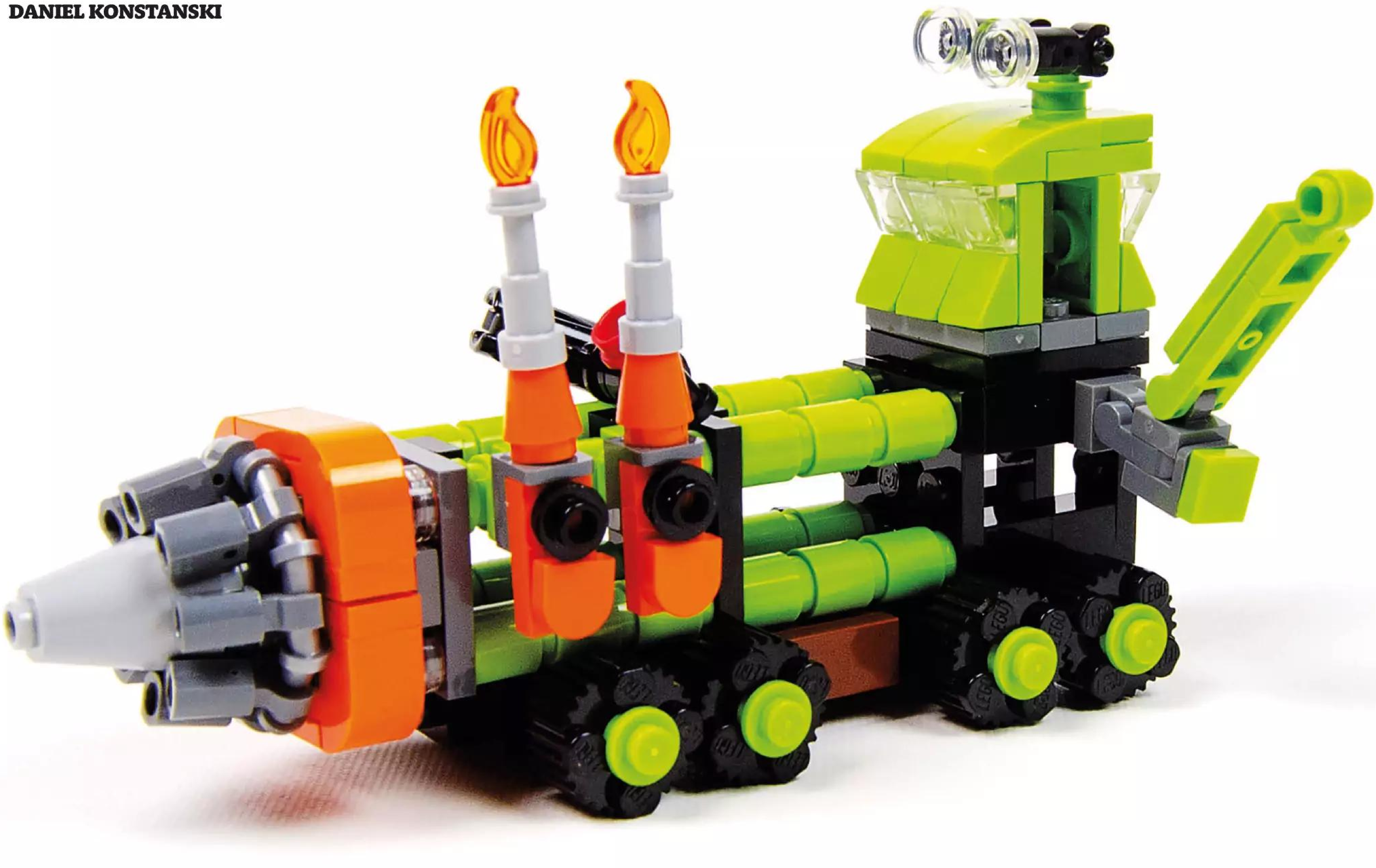
If you're on an underground mission plagued by Rock Monsters, you can be sure you'll need some heavy-duty machinery

Power Miners debuted in 2009 with a colourful but industrial science fiction aesthetic. The concept was that a team had been sent underground to investigate the reasons for earthquakes that were causing havoc on the surface, where the characters came across the Energy Crystals and the Rock Monsters. 8964 Titanium Command Rig, the theme's largest set, still stands out for its original concept and enormous size.

Power Miners had a distinctive industrial aesthetic. These were intended to be big, tough, machines and nothing communicated that message more clearly than their giant drills. Accordingly, capturing the correct look and feel of 8964's nose drill is the most important part of this build, specifically its slope from wide to narrow. An octagonal bar element is the perfect part when paired with bar holders that are slanted slightly inwards.

The LEGO Group hasn't offered a theme similar to Power Miners since it retired in 2010. There are a variety of amazing vehicles that would look awesome in a miniature diorama. 8709 Underground Mining Station or 8961 Crystal Sweeper would be great alongside this miniature Titanium Command Rig.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI



Get the parts list: blocksmag.com/goto/command-rig

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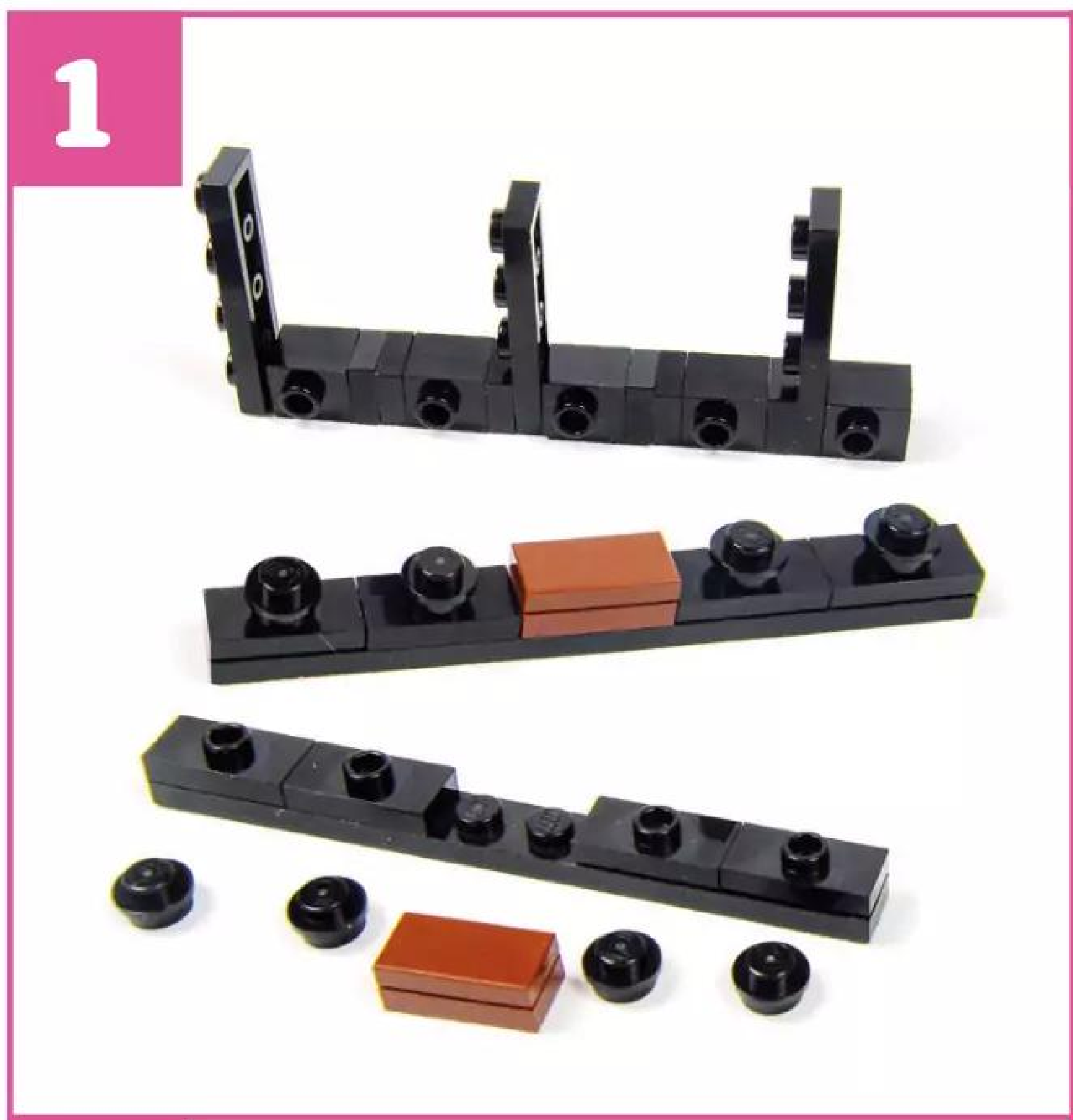

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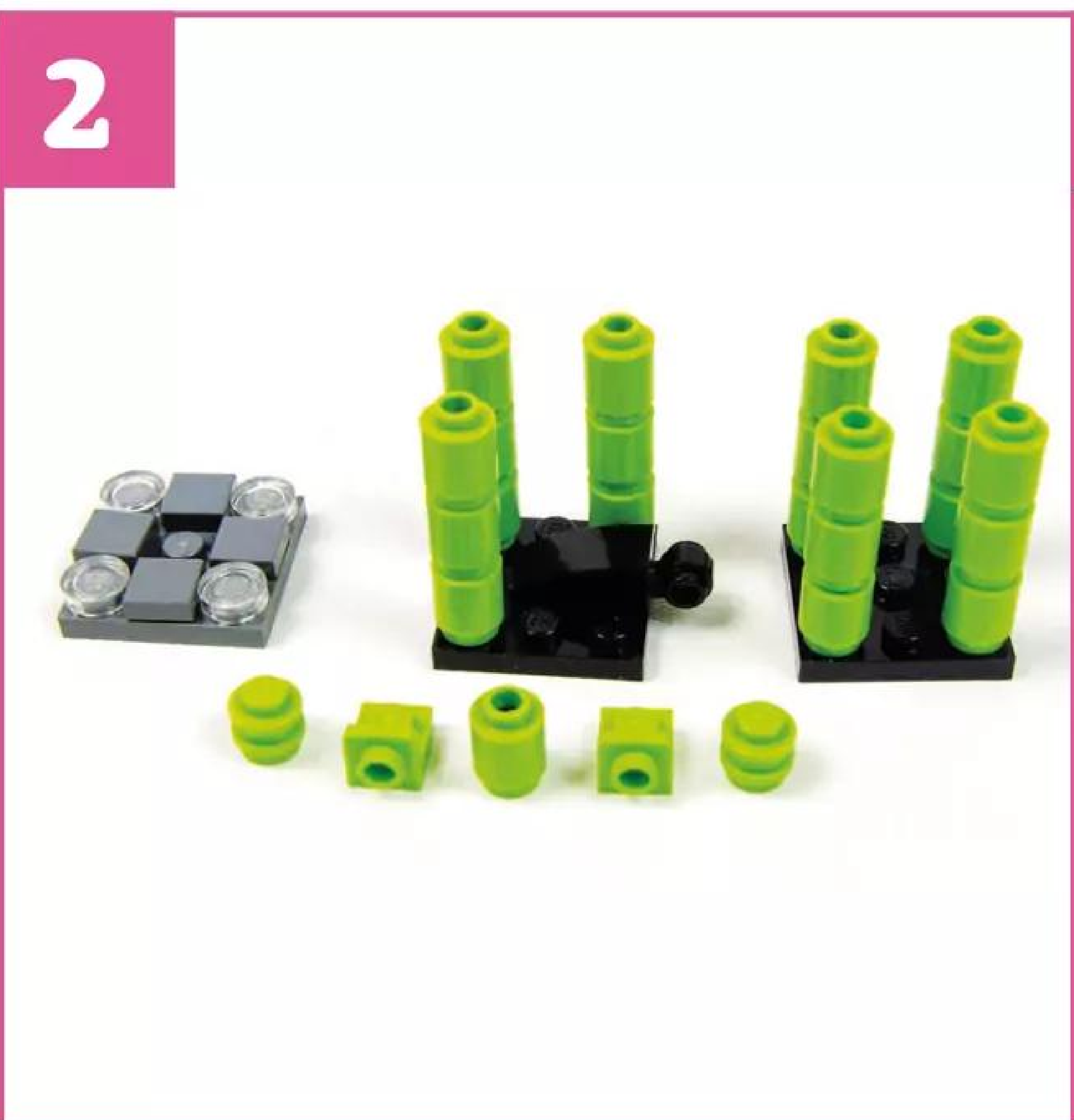

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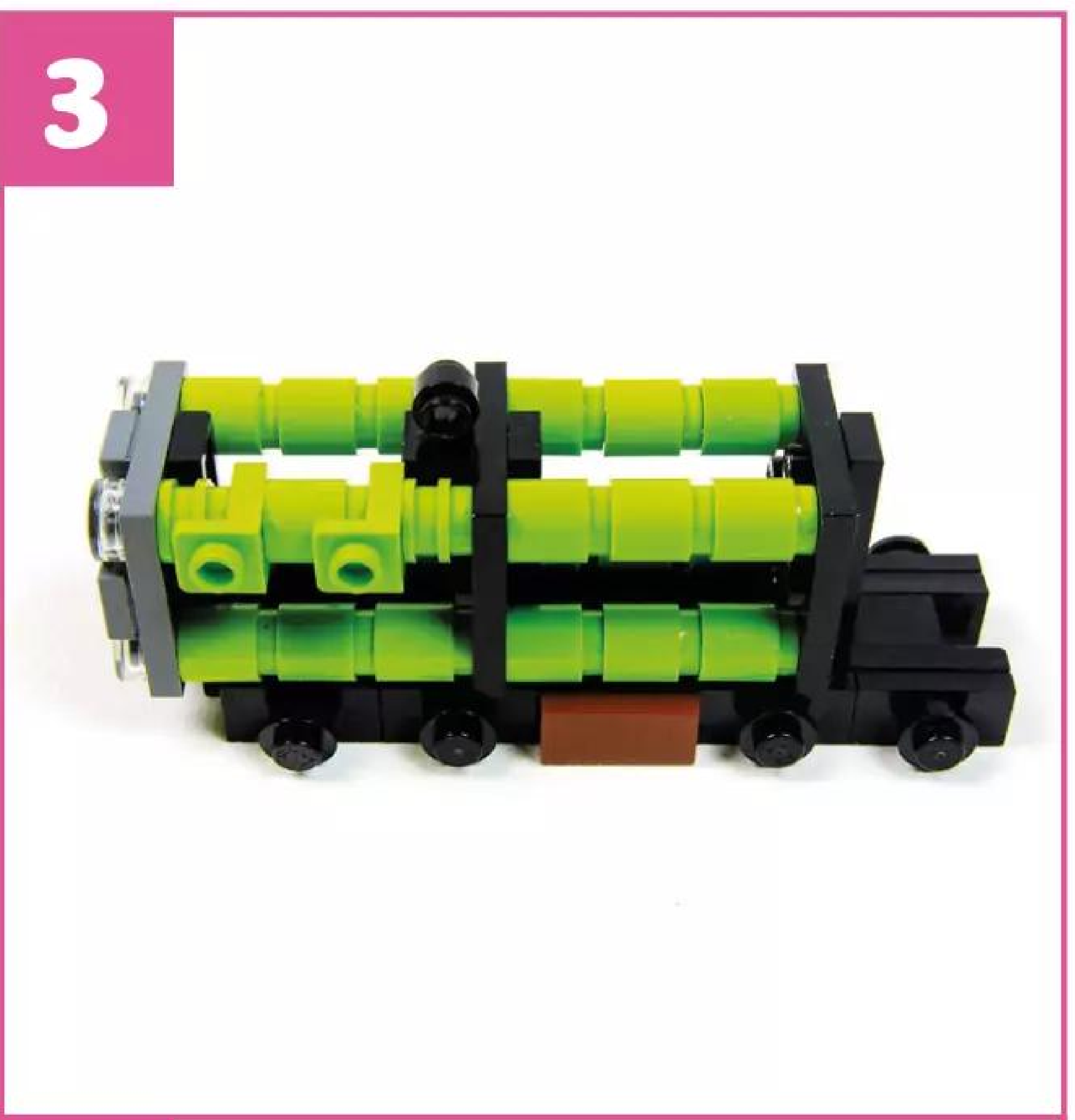

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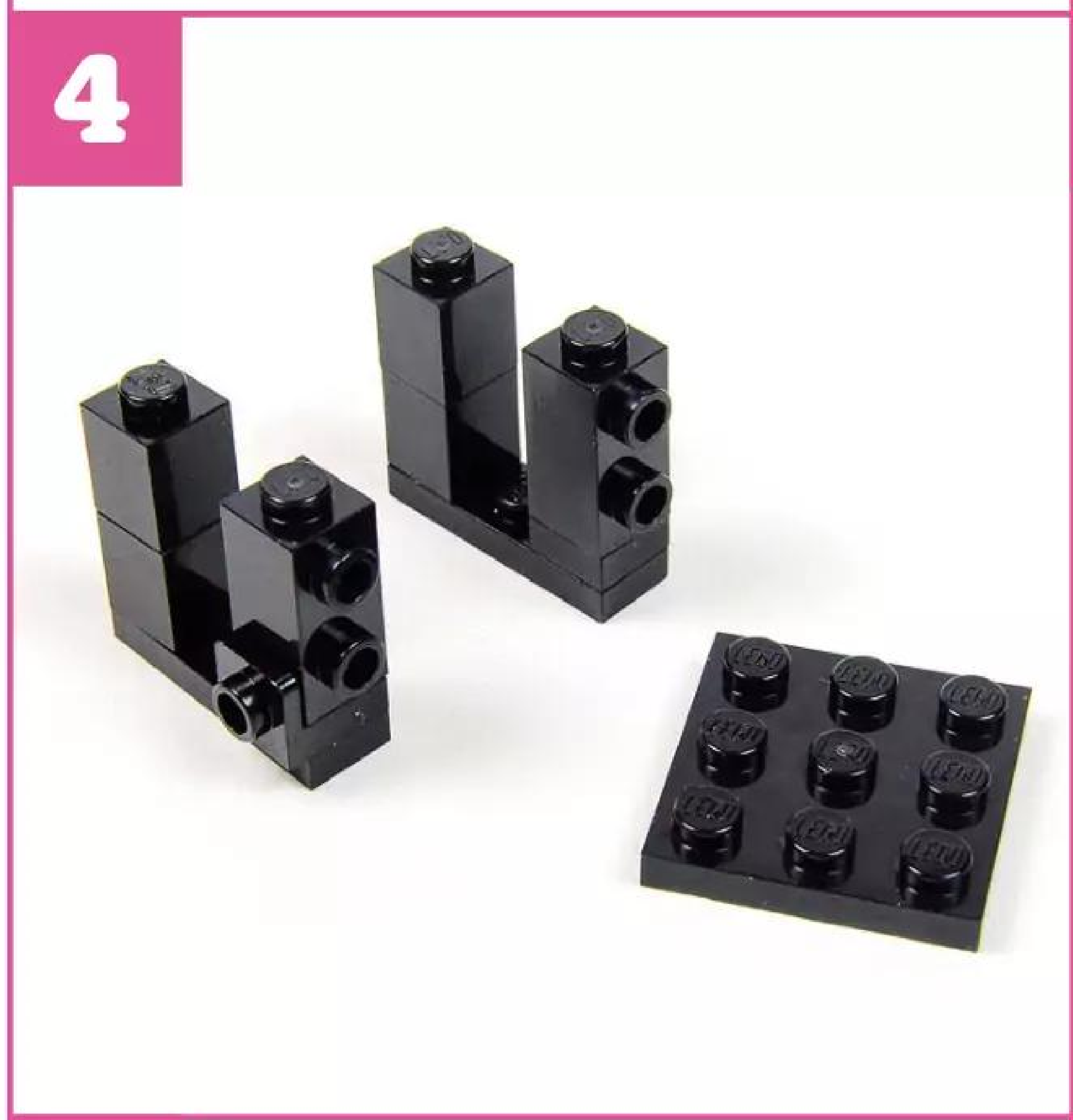

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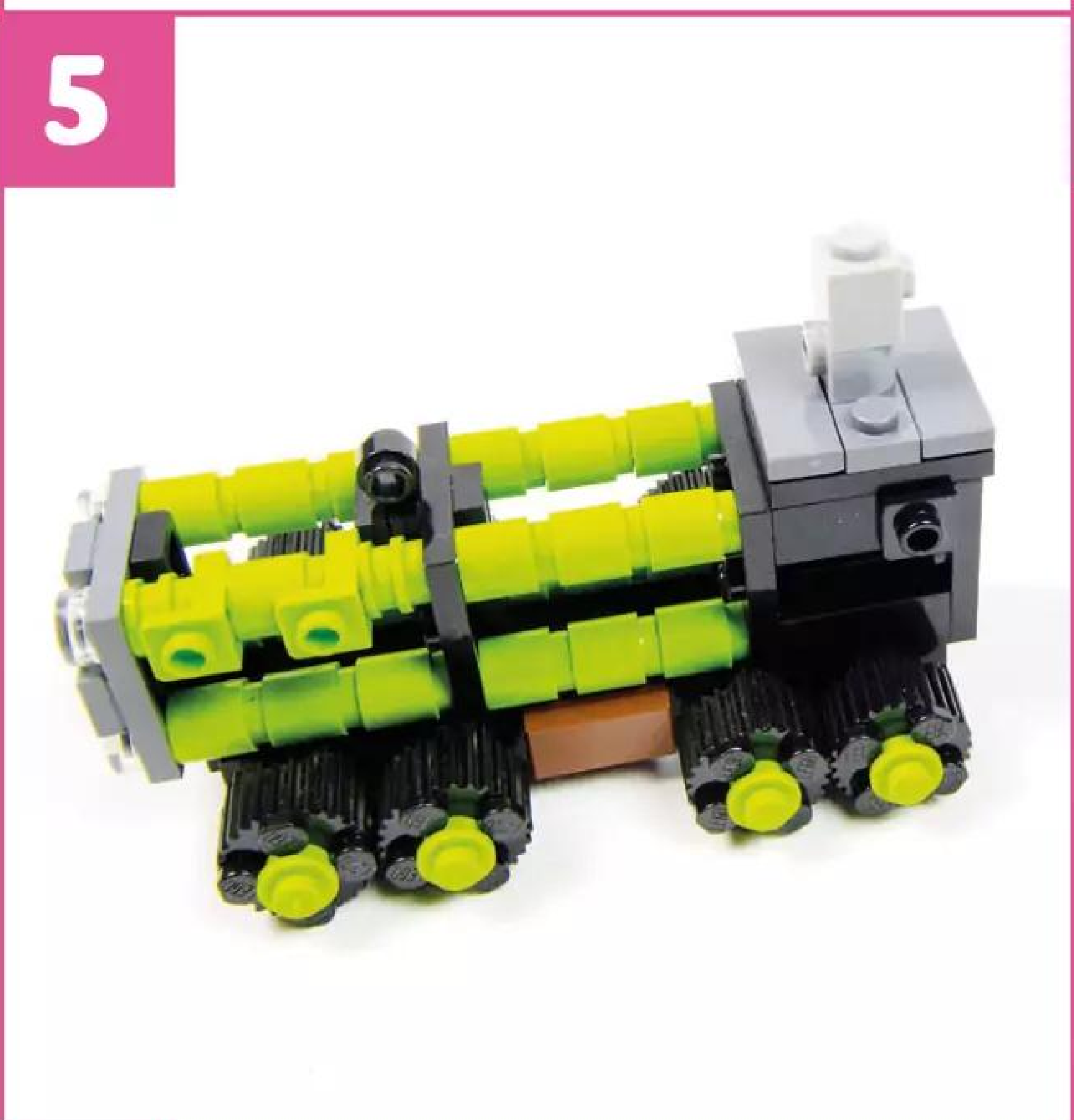

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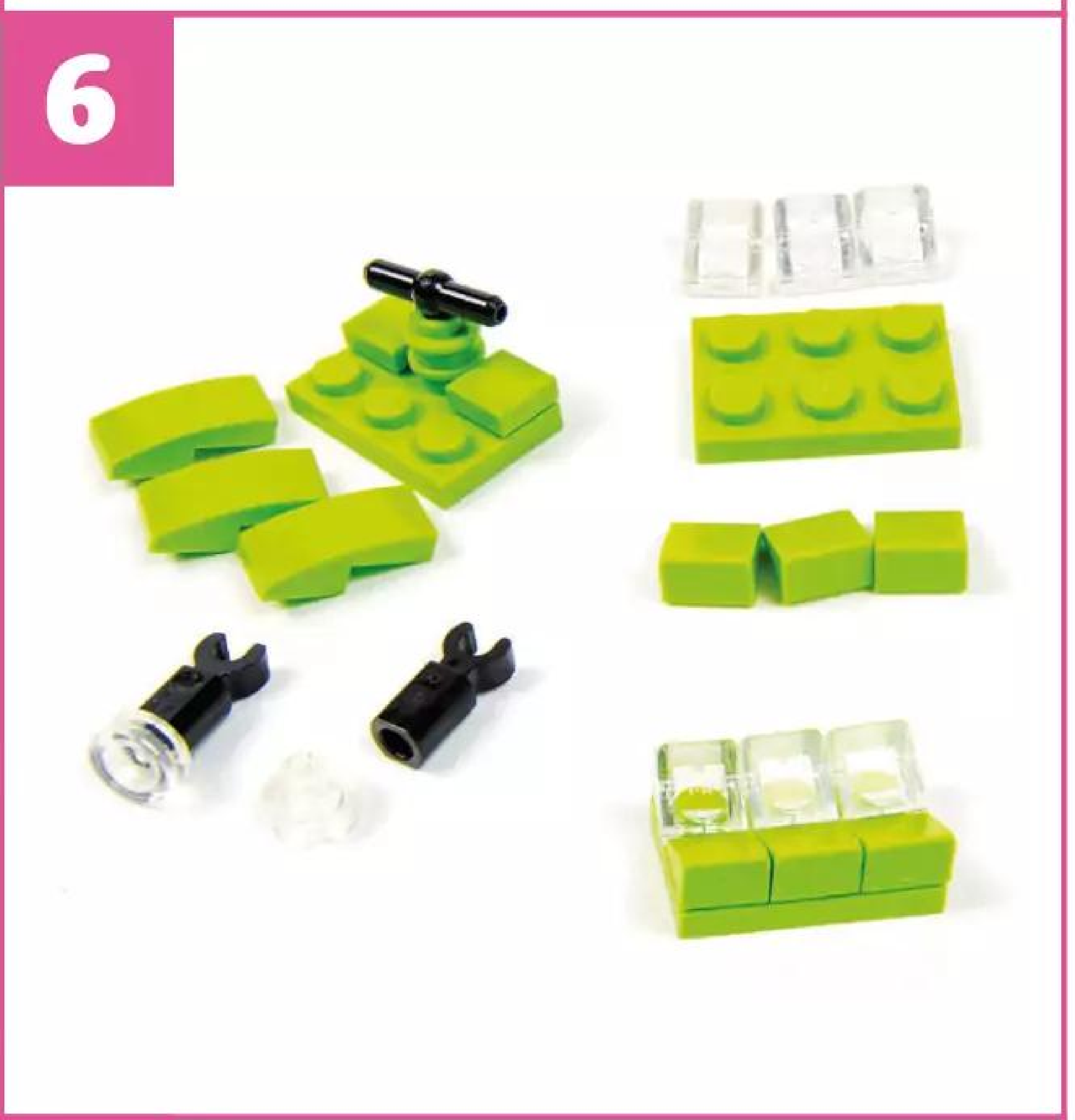

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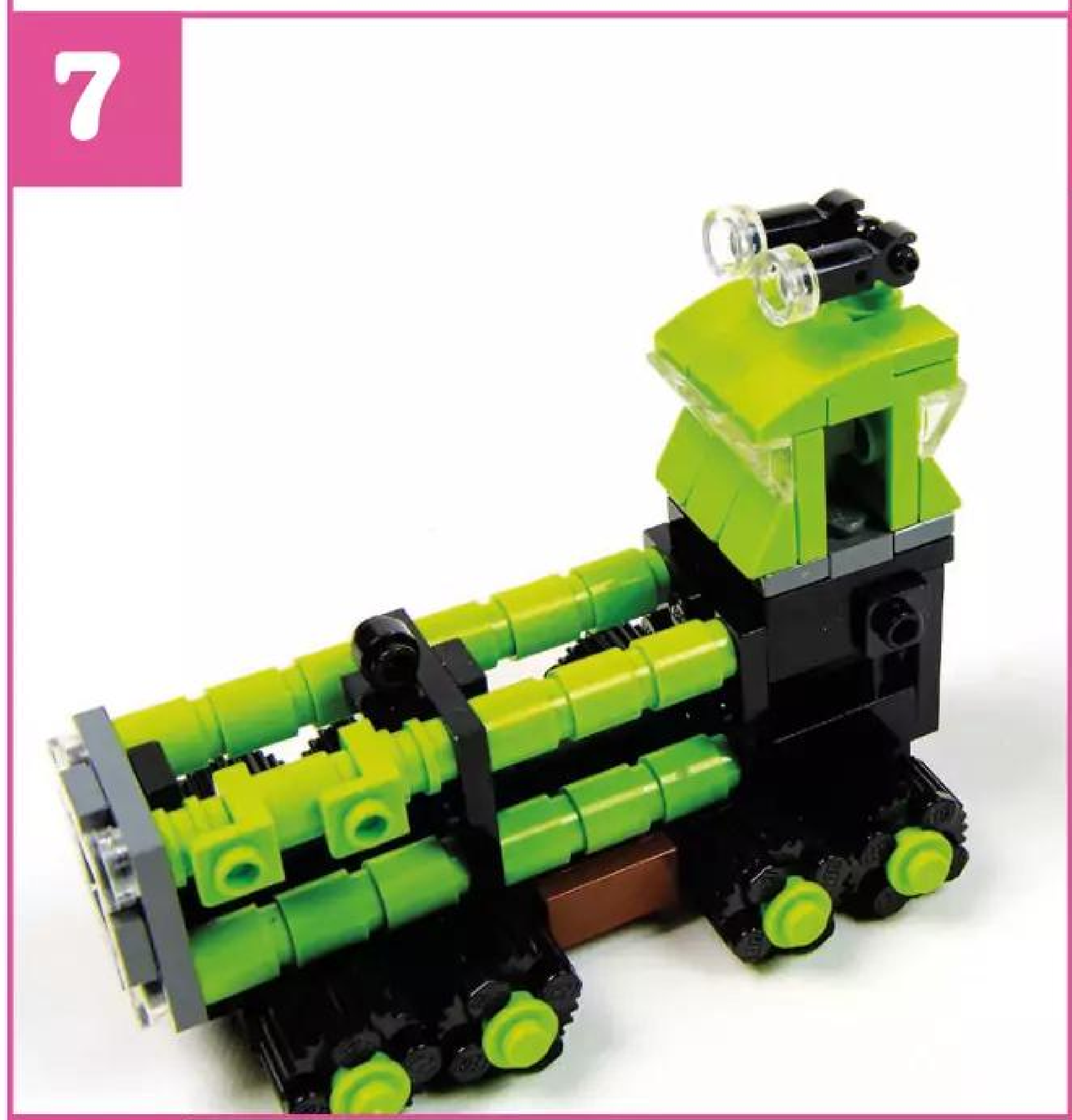

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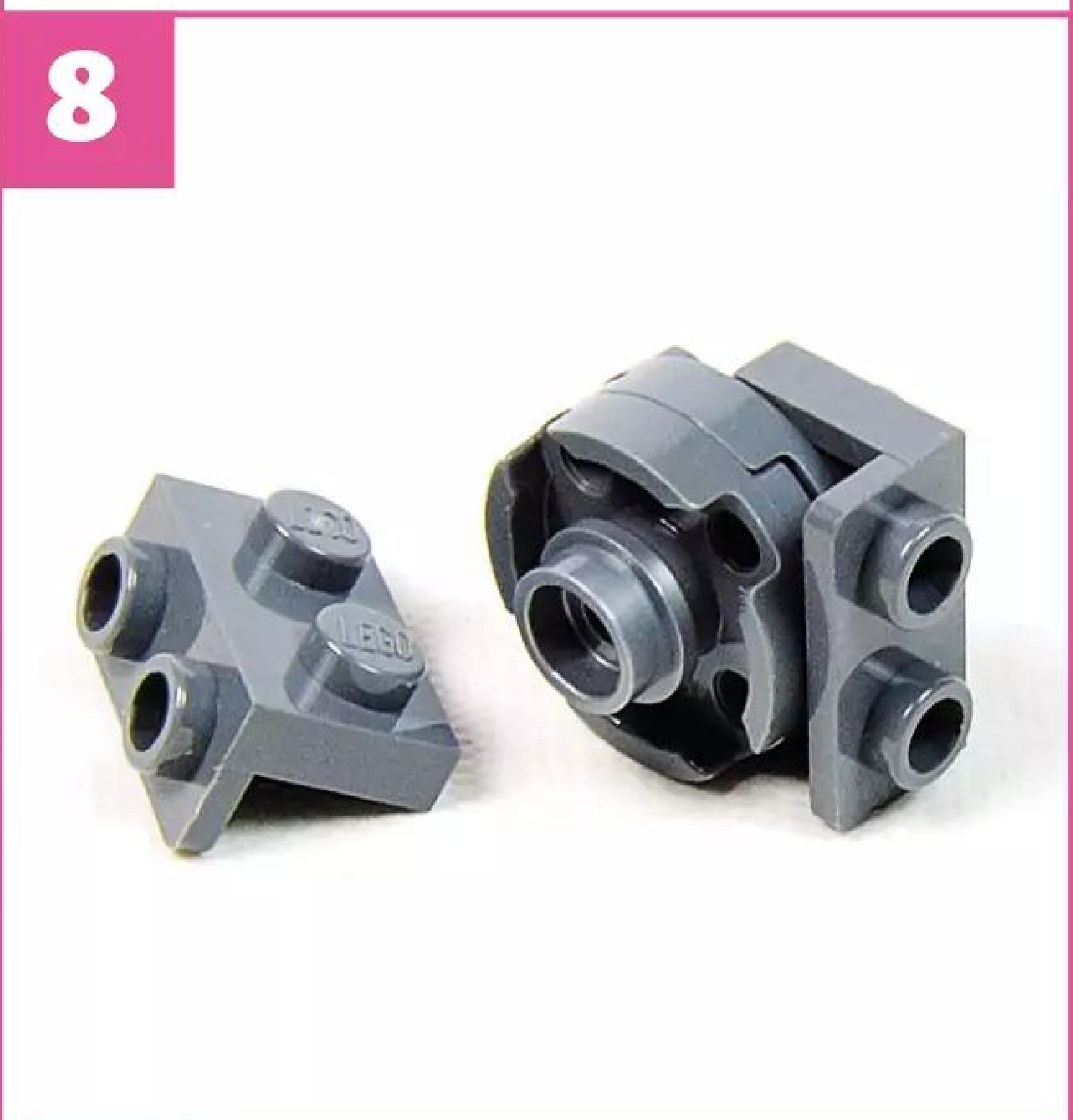

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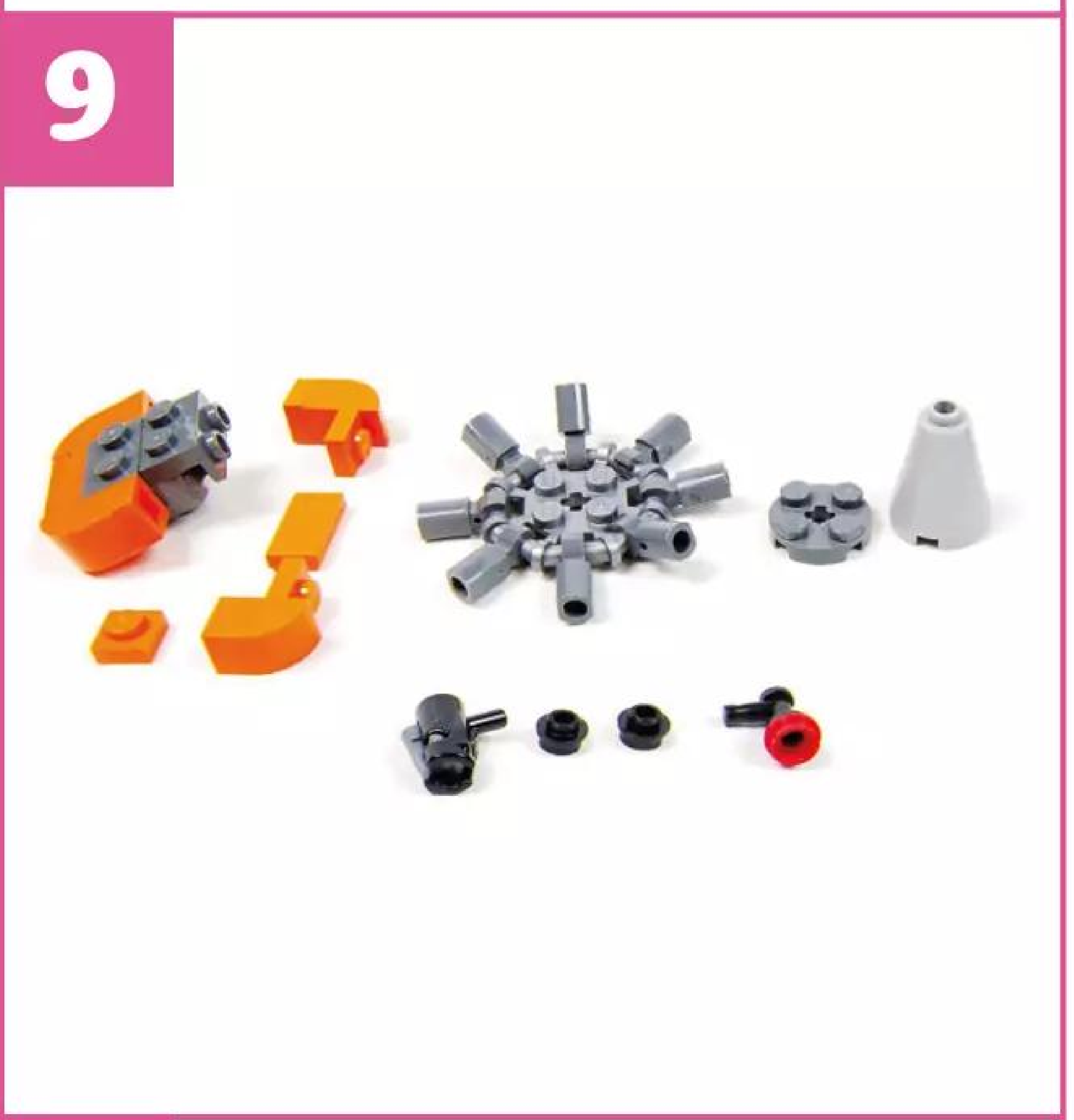

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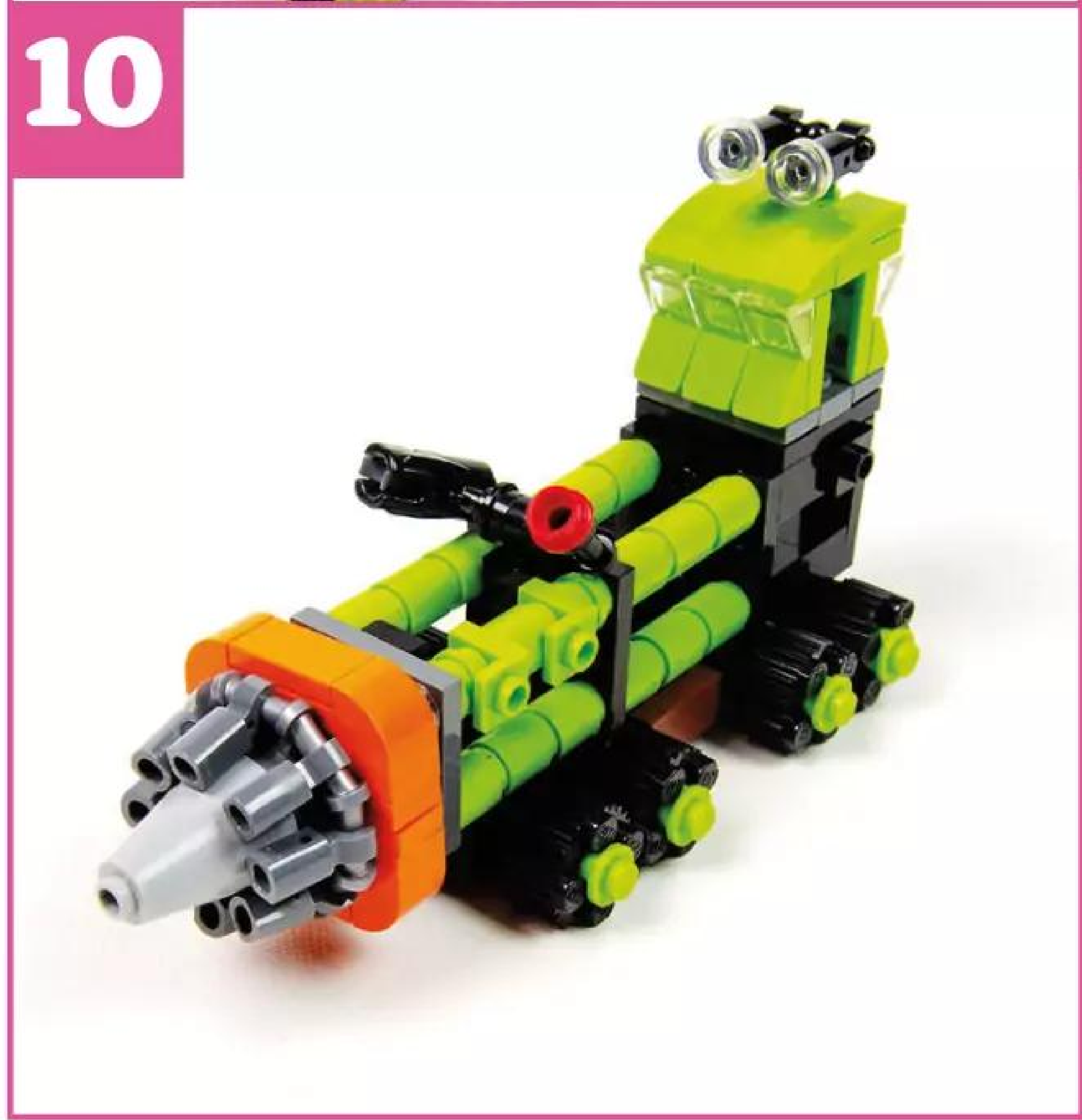

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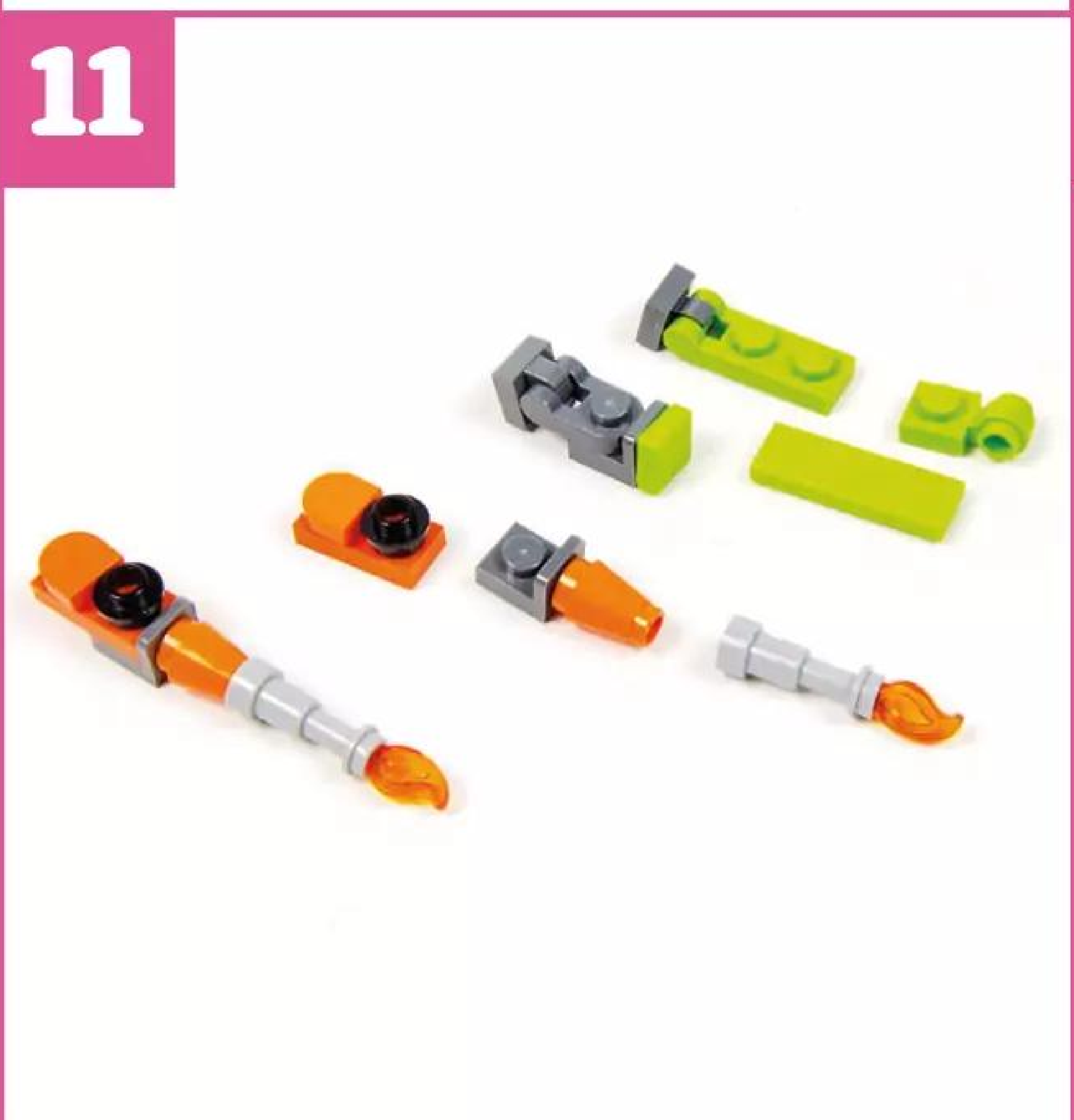

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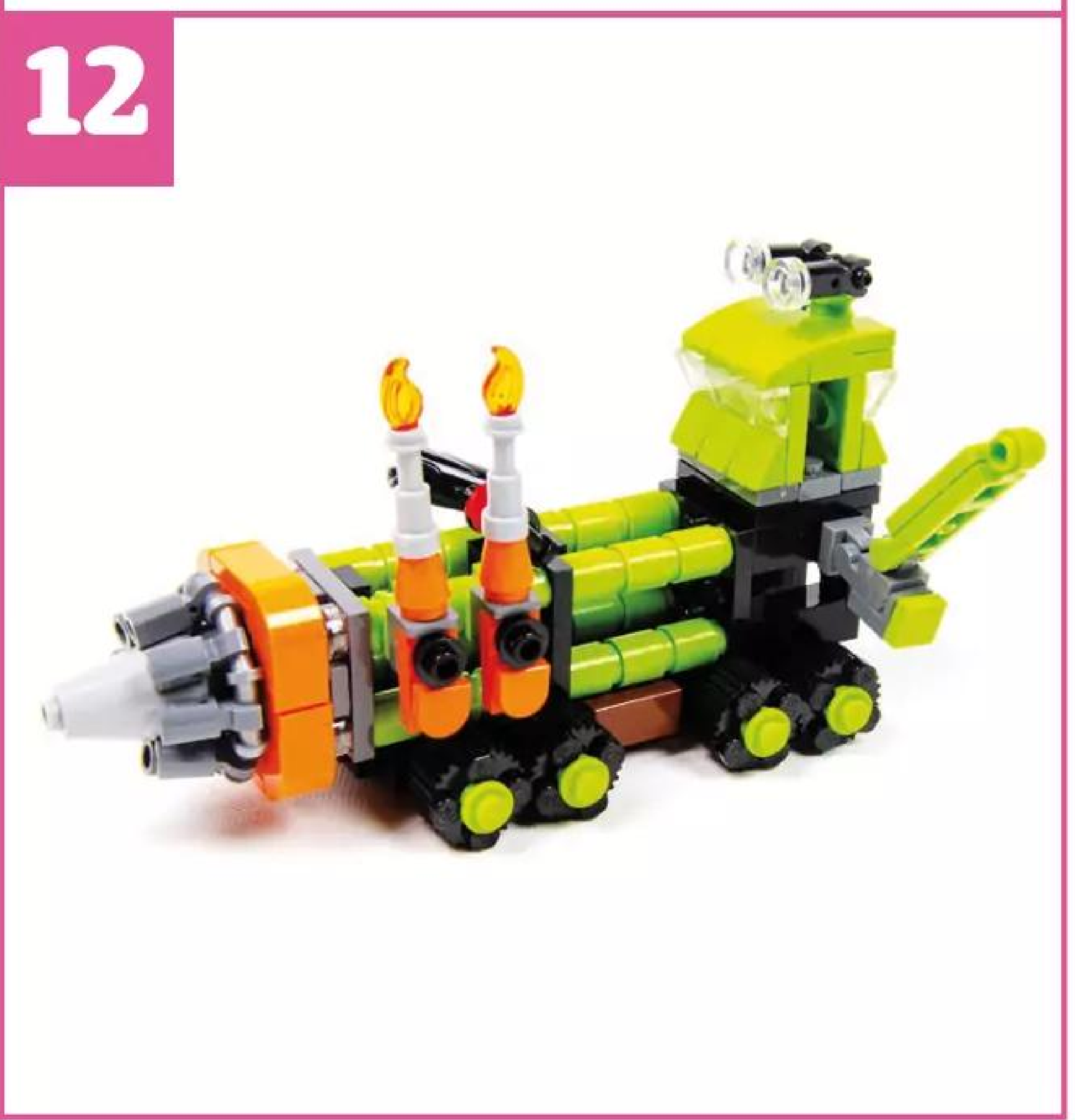
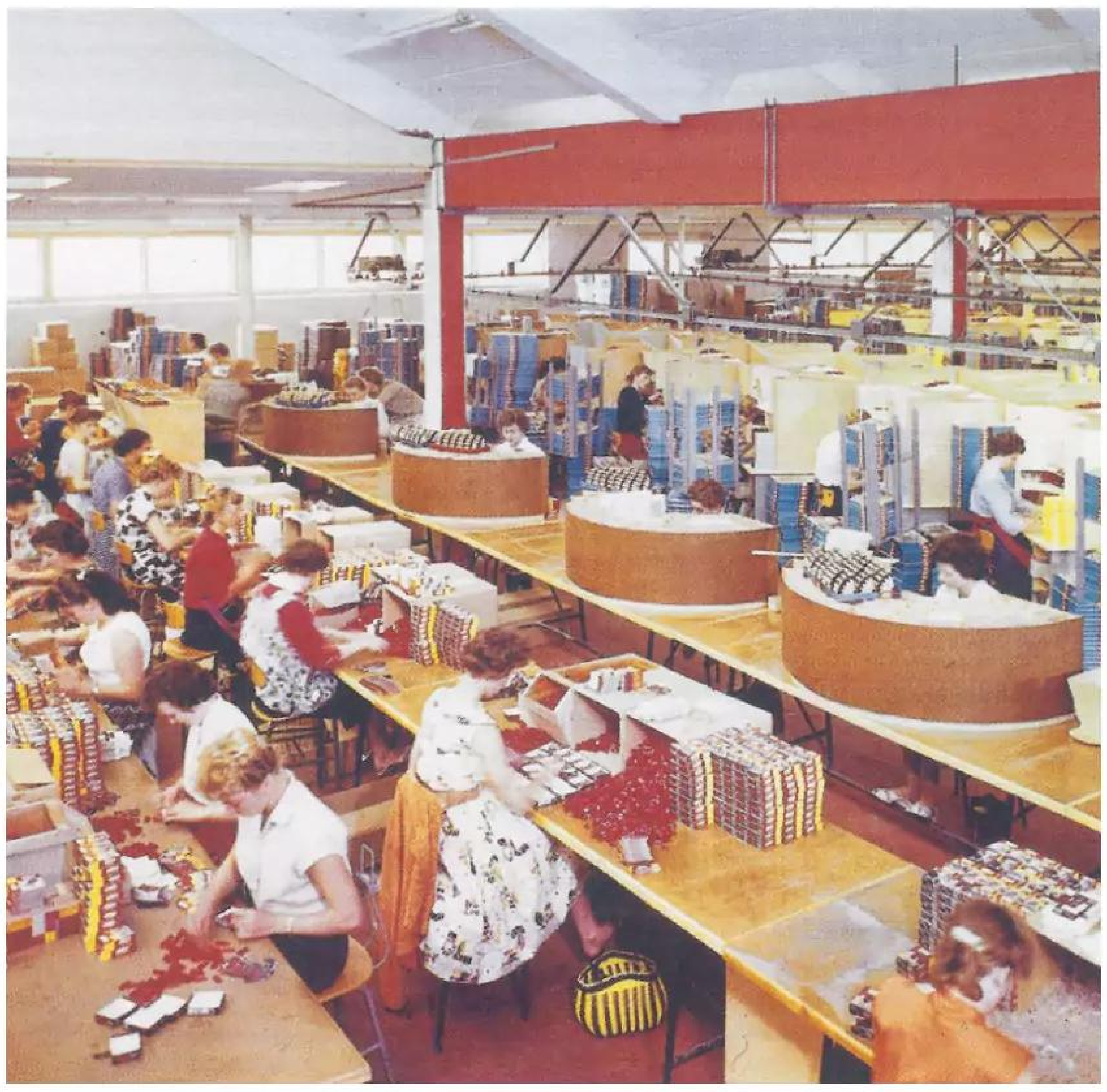


From the Vault

PACKING BY HAND

Today, there are conveyor belts and robots to pack boxes in LEGO factories – but back in the day, it was all done by hand



Left: Packing hall in Billund, 1961.

Below: Modern packing lines operate very differently.

Everyone has experienced it. While building a LEGO set one of the parts appears to be missing. Almost every time it turns out to be stuck in the corner of a bag or you realise that you mistakenly used it earlier – but back in the 1970s, the dreaded 'missing brick' was a real problem.

Since introducing the precursor to the LEGO brick in 1949, products that included the company's elements were packed by hand. For more than two decades, employees from Billund and its surrounding countryside sat in packing halls, usually located right next to or even in the factory where the bricks were manufactured, and packed boxes of bricks by hand. Employees of the company today will tell stories from their grandparents about shifts spent with friends talking about life while packing LEGO boxes.

Early on, when sets were just collections of loose bricks, elements were arranged into grids so it was easy to do a quick visual check that everything was included. As Town Plan and then other lines such as Trains introduced specific models and a greater assortment of part types, the process became more complicated.

Manual counting and packing were rife with the potential for error. Sometimes this could be in the consumer's favour as an extra part or two would make it out of the packing hall, but it was just as likely that something could be missing. Children would not be happy if they couldn't finish their set, which might stop them wanting any more boxes.

This problem reached its peak in the early 1970s. An internal study revealed that nearly half of the company's products were arriving to customers with either too many or too few bricks. Concurrently, LEGO sets were getting bigger and more complex, compounding the chances of an error occuring. Something needed to change.

Pre-pack lines were introduced to solve the problem. Employees packed subsets of elements into bags that could be weighed against a known target value. This assured that the right number and selection of parts was being packed. As everything was sorted by size, the risk of an extra, larger part disguising the absence of several smaller ones was reduced. Once bagged, the bricks could be sent to the final pack department where the bags were placed into boxes. Pre-pack lines were phased in during the late 1970s and dramatically reduced errors.

Today this process is automated, with both bagging and packing done by machines. Packing is still occasionally done by hand, especially in sets that are medium sized or larger. Whether it's a unique component or some sort of insert, there are still a few aspects of the process that rely on human dexterity.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI

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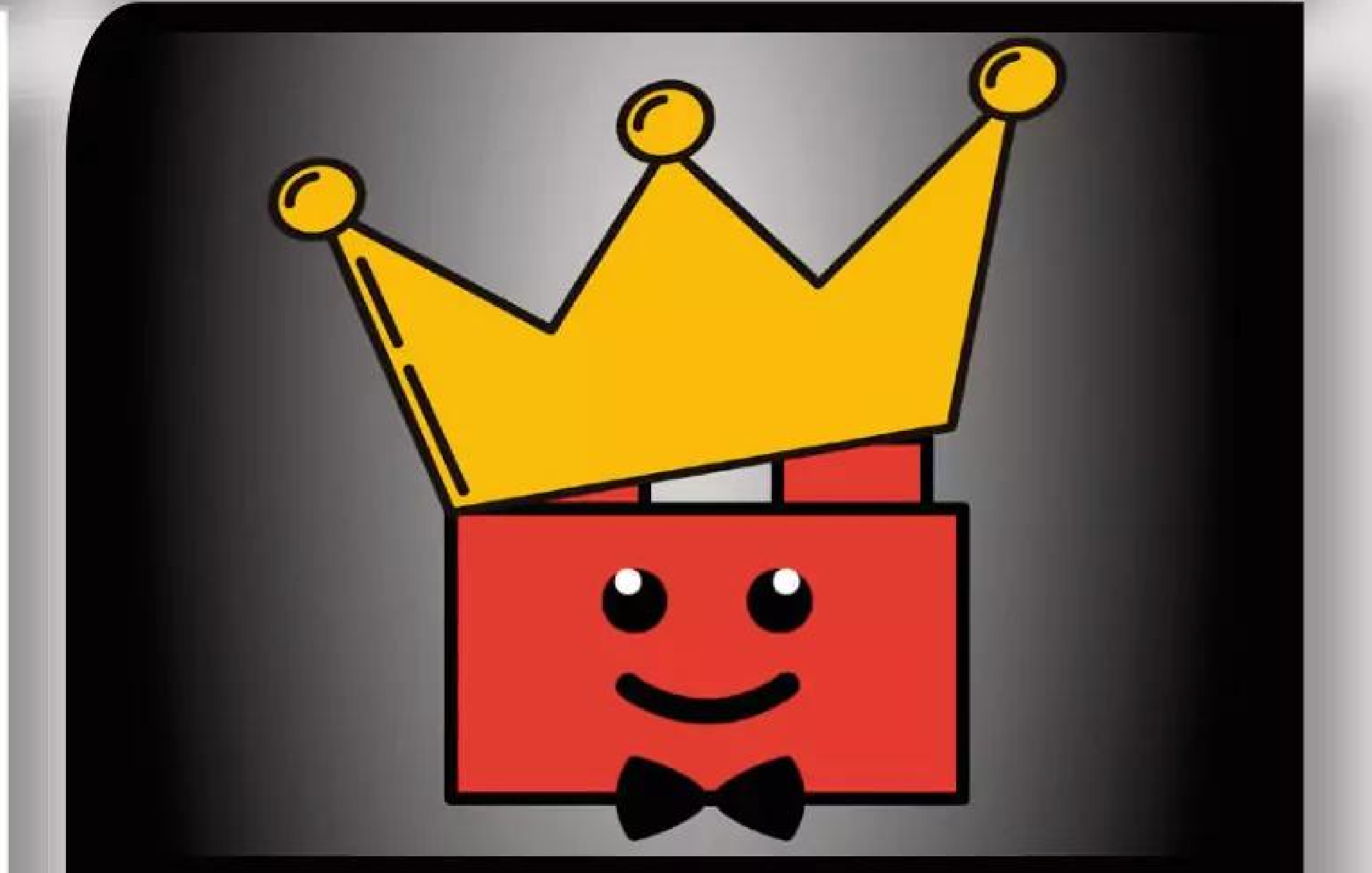

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